

Australian Consumers' Association

June 1995

CHOICE

A skier in a red suit is captured mid-jump against a dark blue background. The skier is wearing a white knit hat, goggles, and black gloves. They are holding ski poles and their skis are visible. A large spray of white snow is erupting from the skier's position, creating a dynamic and energetic scene.

Ski holidays

Fun in the snow without
freezing your finances

Kangaroo meat

Safe for human consumption?

Toxic shock syndrome

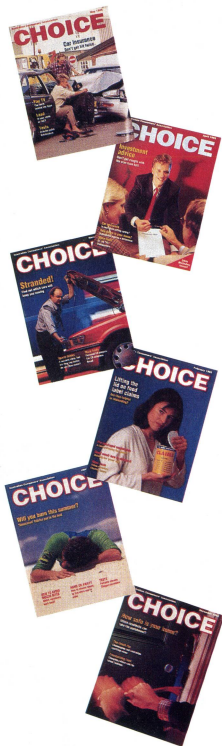
The facts about tampons

Tests

Colour print film

Convection heaters

Electric cooktops



About the Consumers' Association

The Australian Consumers' Association is a non-profit, non-party-political organisation established in 1959 to provide consumers with information and advice on goods, services, health and personal finances, and to help maintain and enhance the quality of life for consumers.

We are completely independent. We buy all the products we test on the open market. We are not beholden to any commercial, government or union interests, and we don't accept advertising, paid or unpaid. Our income is derived from the sale of CHOICE and our other publications and products.

We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are usually based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a Best Buy. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted. We can't conduct special tests or provide information about tested products beyond what appears in CHOICE.

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We represent and act in consumers' interests. We lobby and campaign on behalf of consumers to promote consumers' rights, to influence government policy, and to ensure consumer issues have a high profile in the public arena.

Membership. Subscribers can become voting members of the Consumers' Association on application. Membership costs \$75 per year, which covers your subscription to CHOICE plus a further subscription to our consumer policy and campaigning magazine, *Consuming Interest*.

About CHOICE

CHOICE is published monthly by the Australian Consumers' Association.

Subscription rates. \$48 for one year, \$89 for two years; institutions \$66 per year. **Subscription problems or changes of address.** Write to Subscriptions Department, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, phone (02) 558 8088 or fax (02) 559 3260. Please include your subscriber number (found in the top corner of your CHOICE address label) or have it ready by you when you phone us.

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Other Consumers' Association products

Choice Books publishes non-fiction titles on a wide range of topics, with a consumer perspective.

Consumer Bookshelf offers both Choice Books and material from other publishers for sale by mail order.

Test Research provides fee-for-service testing and research on consumer products, services and regulatory issues for other consumer organisations, government and industry. For work to be accepted by Test Research, consumer benefit must be the primary outcome (for example, testing for energy labelling).

Consuming Interest, our quarterly campaigning magazine, is published in February, May, August and November. It provides straight facts, probing analysis, in-depth reporting, informed opinion and stimulating debates. It also gives updates on the lobbying and campaign projects of the Consumers' Association.

CHOICE Travel. This magazine is produced by the UK Consumers' Association and reprinted by CHOICE four times a year. Its reports are independent in the same style as CHOICE and, while they're written from the perspective of a European base, most of the information in them is just as useful to travelling Australians.

6



Cover photo: Australian Picture Library/West Stock

13



38

Next issue

Vacuum cleaners, fax machines, 'lean' mince, anti-scald devices, using the hospital system, air pollution, renting vs buying a home.

August, September, October

Tests: cordless drills, laundry detergents, 500 L fridges, washing machines, computer printers, high chairs, hair removal devices, roof ventilators, air conditioners, trans-fatty acids.

Reports: Using the hospital system (part 2), buying shares, removalists, drinking water quality, savings accounts, food labelling, pet food, the republic debate.

Choice Regulars

4 Choice Cuts

Weak complaints scheme for financial planners; Clearasil and corporate sponsorship in schools; heart-safe eggs; Victorian tenants and water rates; women and superannuation.

20 Bodywise: tampons and toxic shock

Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a rare but serious and sometimes fatal illness. Tampons don't cause TSS but they do increase the risk of developing the illness. Should women stop using them? We put the issue into perspective.

23 Four year index: July 1991 to June 1995

27 Consumer Bookshelf

35 Consumer In Law: Questioning Big Brother

It's easy to feel powerless when you're dealing with a big government department. The good news is that it's your legal right to ask for a review when a decision is made against you — we tell you how.

46 What do you know?

47 Recalls and bans

Choice Reports

6 Ski scene

We tell you everything you need to know to have a great — and affordable — holiday on the ski slopes. This comprehensive guide to ski holidays will help you to choose between different packages and give you information about all the major Australian ski resorts.

13 Kangaroo meat: the arguments

Kangaroo meat is now legally available for human consumption in all Australian states and territories. Animal welfare groups argue that kangaroo harvesting is cruel and unsustainable and that kangaroo game meat poses a health hazard. The kangaroo meat industry says these arguments are out of date. We explore both sides of the debate.

16 Your rights to access

New disability laws and building regulations recognise the rights of people with disabilities to participate fully in society. We look at how these laws may help you, and suggest some access support services.

Choice Tests

30 Colour print film

Our test results will help you to ensure the colour print film you select for your camera gives you a top-quality final print. We've covered all the most popular brands of colour print film available and included tips on processing and looking after your prints.

38 Electric convection heaters

Not all electric convection heaters are powerful enough to thoroughly warm a large room, and two of the models we tested aren't as safe as they should be.

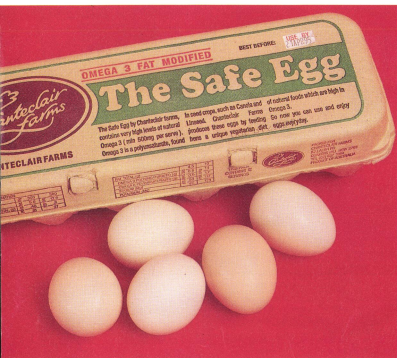
42 Cooktops

Cooktops with glass ceramic surfaces have become increasingly popular recently. They cost more than gas or conventional electric cooktops but what do you get for the added expense? We report on the cooking performance, ease of use and controllability of 11 glass ceramic cooktops.



CHOICE CUTS

Food



'SAFE' EGGS

DON'T BE FOOLED into thinking that 'Safe Eggs' or 'HeartSmart' eggs are the answer to all your cholesterol problems.

These are "eggs you can eat to your heart's content", says the HeartSmart literature. However, according to the National Heart Foundation (NHF), both HeartSmart and Safe eggs have the same amount of saturated fat and cholesterol as standard eggs.

That doesn't mean eggs are unhealthy or unsafe. They're a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals. They're high in cholesterol but for most people that's not a problem. It's usually not the cholesterol in food that raises your blood cholesterol level, but the level of saturated fat in your diet. So if your blood cholesterol level is high, you should cut down on fatty foods, not necessarily eggs (which aren't particularly high in fat).

The NHF says people who don't have a cholesterol problem can safely eat one egg a day. If your blood cholesterol reading is high (above 5.5 mmol/L), in most cases you can still eat up to three or four

eggs a week. However, the NHF warns it could be harmful for people with high blood cholesterol to eat two eggs a day (including HeartSmart and Safe types), as suggested in the HeartSmart advertising material. Some people who are particularly sensitive to dietary cholesterol may need to give eggs up altogether.

Safe Eggs (sold in NSW, SA and Tasmania) and HeartSmart Eggs (currently available only in Tasmania) are promoted as being rich in omega 3 fatty acids and Vitamin E. But the NHF says omega 3 acids are found in only slightly higher amounts in these eggs than in standard eggs. Fish is a much better source of omega 3 than any eggs. In addition, it's not yet known for sure whether omega 3 fats do have a beneficial effect on blood cholesterol.

As for vitamin E, there's no clear evidence that it can help prevent heart disease either. If you're looking for a good source of vitamin E, there's far more in seeds, seed oils, nuts and seafoods than in eggs produced from hens fed a vitamin E-rich diet.

Corporate sponsorship

CLEARASIL 'KULCHA' INVADERS THE CLASSROOM

IMAGINE THE SCENE: a high school English class, pupils reading from Macbeth. "Out, damned spot!" cries one. "Thank God for Clearasil!" exclaims another.

There's no end, it seems, to corporate intrusions into the classroom. In a recent venture, Procter and Gamble, manufacturers of the pimple cream Clearasil, are offering English teachers the chance to win 40 days' relief from face-to-face teaching if their students produce the best radio commercial promoting the product.

Procter and Gamble will pay casual teachers to replace regular classroom staff, at a cost of \$5000. The winning students will be rewarded with a free live concert for the whole school by the band Kulcha, and the students who write the winning ad will meet the band and have their ad read on radio. These prizes are surely insignificant compared to the benefits to be reaped by Procter and Gamble in free advertising and potential product sales to captive audiences of thousands of vulnerable, pimply pupils throughout Australia and New Zealand.

According to a spokesperson for Procter and Gamble, there's been overwhelming support for the promotion from English department heads. All high schools in Australia and New Zealand were invited to participate in the competition, designed to fit within

the English curriculum, and 98% have indicated they are interested, he says. Many teachers have indicated they are "crying out for creative writing exercises just like this".

We share the concerns voiced by Denis Fitzgerald, senior vice-president of the NSW Teachers' Federation. "Teachers are effectively becoming agents for Clearasil," he says. Fitzgerald notes the advertising material supplied to teachers and students includes a cassette of Clearasil ads to be played by the teacher in the classroom.

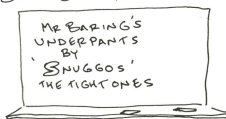
"It's not appropriate for the manufacturers of pimple cream to provide relief teachers and staff development days," says Fitzgerald. "It's up to the government to do that."

CHOICE argues state governments should take the lead on controlling business involvement in the classroom. We'd like to see procedures for evaluating corporate resource material, a national register of school sponsorship and business links and the establishment of an independent monitoring system to keep tabs on corporate sponsorship in schools.

If you're concerned about the issue of school sponsorship:

- Tell your school principal.
- Voice your concerns at school council or parents' organisation meetings.
- Write to your local MP and your education minister.

THE SEEDY SIDE OF SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP





WEAK COMPLAINTS SCHEME

IN THE April issue of CHOICE we detailed the sorry state of the financial planning industry.

The Financial Planning Association of Australia (FPA) says it is aware of the problems in the industry. The Association's chief executive officer, Jock Rankin, says most of the consumer complaints it receives concern inadequate disclosure of fees and commissions and claims of inappropriate advice.

In a bid to resolve client grievances quickly through mediation rather than often lengthy and costly litigation — as well as to increase its own profile — the FPA has introduced a complaints resolution scheme.

Under the scheme, you may be able to claim up to \$50,000 compensation for advice given by a financial planner who is a member of the FPA, without having to take the matter to court. The scheme is free of charge to consumers.

If you have a complaint against an FPA member, contact them directly about the matter. If you can't resolve the problem with the planner write to the FPA, setting out the details of your grievance. The FPA will then contact the planner's firm, which must investigate the complaint and try to resolve it within six weeks.

If you're not happy with the response from the planner, the next step is to fill out an FPA Complaint Summary Form. The FPA will then act as a mediator and attempt to find a satisfactory solution within eight weeks.

If there's still no agreement, you can ask for an independent adjudicator (not an FPA member) to be appointed, who will have the power to make a compensation award of up to \$50,000.

The adjudicator's decision is binding on the FPA adviser, but not on the consumer. If you reject the adjudicator's decision, you can still take the matter to court.

We have several reservations about the FPA scheme. For a start, the complaints process is relatively complex. Most importantly, the planner must be an FPA member. Currently only around 6000 out of the 30,000 people working in the industry belong to the FPA, so the system simply won't help many consumers.

Another major problem is the scheme's lack of retrospectivity: it applies only to financial products purchased from the beginning of 1995. Many investments (such as superannuation and insurance) are long-term but this scheme won't help you if you discover in 1999 that you were given bad advice in 1994.

Jock Rankin says the FPA is aware of this problem and will consider complaints about a planner's conduct prior to 1995 — providing the planner concerned and their insurer agree.

We also question the maximum compensation being set at \$50,000. Rankin says the size of the claim may be reviewed at a later stage if it's found to be insufficient. At the moment, in certain cases, consumers may claim up to \$100,000 — if the planner involved consents.

The best way to ensure complaints are handled fairly is for the government regulator, the Australian Securities Commission, to introduce and supervise an industry-funded complaints scheme, which covers all financial planners and has more realistic limits on retrospectivity and compensation amounts.

For more information about the FPA scheme, contact the Complaints Resolution Scheme Manager, Financial Planning Association of Australia Limited, PO Box 109, Market St, Victoria 3000; phone (03) 614 2289 or 1800 337 301.

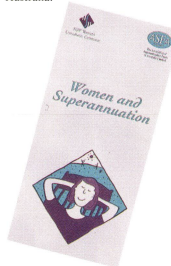
SUPER WOMEN

A NEW PAMPHLET jointly funded by the NSW Women's Consultative Committee and the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia Limited aims to demystify superannuation for women.

The *Women and Superannuation* pamphlet lists questions women should ask about their super funds, discusses how much women and their employers should be contributing, and identifies whom to contact if you need more information about your super. It also explains what happens if you take maternity leave, work as a casual or change employers.

Women in particular must think seriously about their superannuation because they tend to take breaks from the workforce or work on a casual or part-time basis and many earn less than average weekly earnings. This means they have less time to save money for retirement.

The pamphlet is available from employer groups, unions, women's organisations, community groups, the Women's Consultative Committee and the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia.



User-pays

COOL, CLEAR AND VERY DEAR

SINCE APRIL, Melbourne property owners have received a reduction in their property-based water rates but Melbourne tenants have been paying a new sewerage usage charge — in addition to an existing water usage charge.

The Tenants Union of Victoria says the new charge is unjustified and disadvantages tenants. They believe tenants should only pay the water usage charge.

Tenants Union project manager, Marcia McLennan, says this type of user-pays pricing system fails in the rental market. "User-pays is designed as a price signal to people to shape up or pay up but tenants don't have total control over water usage," she says. Tenants have less opportunity to reduce their water consumption and waste disposal because the landlord decides what

water-efficient fixtures and fittings will be installed in a rented premises.

Tenants also have no control over repairs to water systems fixtures — and this could lead to much higher water bills if they have to wait weeks or even months for repairs to be completed.

The Victorian government should either eliminate this charge altogether or offer subsidies to enable tenants to buy water-saving devices.

If you want to lobby against Victorian tenants having to pay such charges, you can contact the Victorian Minister for Housing, Rob Knowles, Victorian State Parliament House, Spring St, Melbourne 3002 or your local state member in Victoria.

MELBOURNE BANDS CONSERVING WATER



Ski scene



Are you thinking of going skiing but don't know where or when to go or what gear you'll need? Here's a guide to help you plan your ski holiday.

SCHUSSING DOWN SNOWY slopes, drinking in the clean, crisp mountain air — or soaking up the cosy atmosphere of an apres-ski bar — can be great fun. And if you shop around for a good deal and budget well, the price of a holiday in the Australian Alps need not chill you to the bone.

When planning a ski holiday, you need to consider the costs of special ski clothing and equipment, lifts and lessons and possibly childcare, as well as the usual holiday expenses of transport, accommodation, meals, refreshments and entertainment.

Small additional expenses can mount up. For example, the Victorian resorts have a daily resort entry fee (and most have an overnight parking fee), while to enter resorts in NSW and Tasmania you must pay a national park fee. If you're driving to the resorts, you must carry

snow chains. You can hire them from towns below the snowline.

Skiing is an expensive activity, but tour companies are becoming increasingly competitive and offering better value for money. There are some bargains around, especially if you take a package deal.

Packages

Hundreds of ski packages are available to suit most tastes and pockets. They may include transport, accommodation, ski hire, lessons, a lift pass, resort entry and national park fees and some meals. Brochures are available from your travel agent or from the resorts (see *A downhill resort guide* on page 10 for contact numbers). You can go to the snow by air, coach or car and stay in accommodation ranging from backpacker lodges to luxury resorts. It usually works out cheaper

to choose a package than to book accommodation only, but to get the best deal you need to check exactly what's included.

You also need to decide what you want from your snow holiday. If, for example, your main aim is to learn to ski, a package which includes accommodation, ski and boot hire, lift passes and lessons offers the best value for money. If you're new to skiing, ask whether your resort has beginners' lift and lesson packages: these are good value, offering tuition and discount lift tickets (in the early stage you won't have the ability to make full use of a normal day lift ticket).

If you have limited time and money and you just want a taste of skiing with lots of camaraderie, you may opt for a weekend coach tour to the snow. Coach packages are cheap, but they can have drawbacks. The accommodation (usually two or more people in a room) is often some distance away from the slopes, so you may spend a lot of time on the bus. If you're not staying on the snow, you'll probably need to be out of bed early in the morning to board the bus to the ski area and won't be returned to your accommodation until late afternoon.

Accommodation

The type of accommodation you choose is obviously going to affect the cost of your holiday. Is having a spa, sauna and heated swimming pool important to you? Does it matter whether you have to share a room or bathroom with strangers? Costs drop dramatically if you share



Falls Creek, Victoria

When to go

Our mountains aren't as steep or high as those in many other countries and our resorts don't have reliable snow cover year after year. The ski season is relatively short — from June to the end of September or early October (and shorter still in Tasmania).

In June there's often a lack of snow, but even in a bad season there may be enough for beginners to have fun. Most resorts also have snow making facilities, so when the temperature drops below freezing and the humidity is appropriate, manufactured snow can be sprayed onto certain slopes. If you're prepared to take the risk of little snow, you can save a lot of money early in the season when resorts offer bargain accommodation rates and some offer free skiing or cheap lift and lesson tickets for guests.

Mid-July to early September is the peak season, when the snow should be at its best. Accommodation bookings are heavy at this time, particularly during school holidays; the slopes are more crowded, there may be long queues for ski lifts and prices are at their peak.

The bargains return in late September. Warmer weather means less frequent snowfalls and receding snow (temperatures may be too high for snow making). By the afternoon, 'spring snow' tends to be somewhat soft and heavy, which can make turning your skis a little more difficult and slow you down — but that may not be a problem for beginners. If there's enough snow, the warm, sunny days, together with discount rates, can make for a very pleasant holiday.

Weekends will be more crowded than during the week at any time in the season. Lift queues will be shorter during the week and many places offer discounted midweek accommodation — so avoid weekends if possible.

Ski School

Many ski holiday packages include group ski lessons. Whether you're an advanced skier or a beginner, you can improve your skiing technique by joining a ski class. It's essential to have a few lessons if you've never skied before. If you're let loose on the slopes not even knowing how to stop properly you may be putting other people, not to mention yourself, at risk of injury. Well-meaning friends and relatives may offer help, but being taught by professionals is safer, you'll progress more quickly and enjoy skiing more if you learn in a class with other beginners.

All Australian resorts have ski schools with qualified instructors. Group lessons are better value for beginners. Group lessons typically last one and a half to two hours, with morning and afternoon sessions. You'll be allocated to a particular class, according to your experience and ability. If you're not happy with the class, explain your problem to the head of the ski school and ask to be put in a more appropriate group.

Most resorts also have a ski kindergarten offering some ski tuition and lots of fun activities over a half or full day for children over three years of age. Expect to pay around \$60-\$80 for a full day including lunch. (For the under-threes, check with the resort office or your lodging whether childcare is available.)

Many resort ski schools also offer lessons in cross-country skiing and snow boarding (like skateboarding on snow, but you must wear special boots locked to a skateboard-shaped ski). Many now have dedicated snow board parks (with half-pipes and jumps).

Small print

When choosing any holiday package, it's wise to check booking and cancellation conditions. Read the small print — packages may not give refunds for prepaid ski lift and lesson tickets if you cancel your holiday. While operators may reasonably expect compensation if they lose money because you cancel, it's unreasonable for them to expect you to pay for lessons and lifts you haven't used — something which won't disadvantage them. We suggest you challenge such cancellation charges and ask the operator to specify the actual amount they've lost.

We recommend you take out insurance to cover cancellation, injury, personal liability and damage to ski equipment. Note that your insurance cover may not cover theft of skis left unattended (so it may be wise to separate your skis when you leave them unattended, so they're less easily spotted as a pair).

Insurance doesn't normally cover lack of snow. However, some resorts (for example, Falls Creek, Mount Buller and Mount Hotham) are now offering a 'ski guarantee' — the cost of prepaid accommodation and lift and lesson tickets may be refunded if there isn't enough snow. If such a scheme is operating in the resort you choose, check whether your lodge is participating in it, the definition of insufficient snow (does it cover only beginners' slopes?) and the precise terms of the guarantee.

a room with a few friends. You can also save money if you opt for a self-catering apartment (or a van in a caravan park). Again, you need to check what's included. Confirm whether linen, towels and crockery are supplied.

You can expect to pay more if your lodging is close to the ski slopes. Staying in a resort is a romantic concept for many snow-starved Aussies more familiar with hot, parched landscapes. It's certainly convenient to be able to clomp on your skis at the lodge door and to know your bed is only a snowball's throw from a lively alpine nightspot. If you're staying on the snow, it's a good idea to check whether oversnow transport is required and how much each trip will cost.

Staying away from the resorts in a neighbouring town can have advantages. Apart from being cheaper, towns may offer more options for non-skiers and for days when the weather is bad. For example, towns like Mount Beauty, Bright and Mansfield, are all under an hour's drive from Victorian resorts (by car or regular bus services). They have a wide range of accommodation, shops and restaurants (generally cheaper than in the resorts), entertainment and non-skiing activities, as well as a choice of sightseeing possibilities.

The same applies to Jindabyne, in NSW, which has plenty of nightlife during the ski season. From there you have a choice of ski resorts to go to each day that are only 30 to 40 minutes' drive away; you can opt for the one with the best snow and conditions on any given day.

Ready for the slopes

What to wear

Your ski holiday will be much more pleasant if you wear warm, comfortable clothes. Ski clothing is expensive, so if you're a first-timer, it's a good idea to hire pants (or 'bib-and-brace' overall) and a jacket, in case you find you hate skiing. Expect to pay \$14 to \$25 a day or from \$42 to \$62 a week.

■ It's best to dress in several thin layers. That way air trapped between the layers can help insulate against the cold and you can peel off an item if you get too hot. Thermal underwear, said to wick moisture away from your skin, is a good investment. You can buy lightweight thermal tops and 'long-johns' at a sports shop or large department store. If it's not too cold, a T-shirt and/or skivvy under your jumper may be adequate.

■ Your ski jacket and pants should be windproof, water-resistant and made of non-slippery fabric (so you don't slide down the mountain when you fall). Make sure seams are well-sealed and zips covered to prevent wind and snow sneaking in through gaps. Don't wear jeans — they can get awfully wet and leave you freezing cold if you fall.

■ A large amount of body heat can be lost through your head so wear a woollen or polypropylene fleece hat which covers your ears.

■ Gloves or mittens are necessary for warmth as well as safety when you fall. Mittens are warmer and good for children's small hands. Choose waterproof gloves with reinforced palms and cuffs that extend over the wrists.

■ Keeping your feet warm is important too. Choose cotton or wool socks. To prevent blisters, socks should fit snugly. Don't wear two pairs inside your ski boots — get boots that fit.

■ Wear sunglasses or goggles to protect against glare caused by sunlight reflecting off the snow. Without protection, your eyes can become sore and snow blindness is a possibility. Polarised lenses are best for cutting out glare. Attach a cord to your glasses to avoid losing them.

■ It's also important to remember to use maximum protection sunscreen to block out powerful UV rays and lip salve to stop the cold wind from chapping your lips.



CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

Growing numbers of skiers are escaping the resort crowds and lift queues and choosing to stride across silent slopes on cross-country or Nordic skis instead.

Nordic skis are longer, thinner and lighter than downhill ones. Their bottom surface is specially treated (often with a fish scale pattern or wax) so you can walk uphill easily but slide freely downhill. The boots are relatively soft and light and are attached to the ski only at the toe.

The Nordic technique is quite different from downhill skiing: you glide forward in a long stride and turn not with



Cross-country skiing at Falls Creek

the skis parallel (like an experienced downhiller) but by a 'telemark turn' — almost kneeling on one knee.

Cross-country skiing is cheaper than downhill (or alpine skiing), as you don't need to use ski lifts — and that means you're not restricted to skiing in resorts. Most resorts have Nordic trails and some — such as Lake Mountain (just over 100 km from Melbourne) and Mount Stirling (near Mount Buller in Victoria) — are exclusively for cross-country skiers. Most resorts also offer cross-country ski lessons and have Nordic equipment for hire.

Equipment

If you're new to skiing, it's best to hire skis, poles and boots so you can try different brands, models and sizes. See if you like skiing before spending several hundred dollars on gear. Hire rates for skis, boots and poles start at around \$20 a day or \$60 a week for adults and \$15 a day or \$39 a week for children.

■ All Australian resorts have ski hire facilities but it's often more expensive to hire at the resort than from a city ski shop. However, if something goes wrong with the equipment or if you're a beginner and want to progress to longer skis as your technique improves, you can get an exchange on the spot. A compromise may be to hire from a ski shop in a town near your resort — or the best deal may be a package included with your accommodation.

■ If you're hiring skis or buying second-hand ones, there are several things to check first. They shouldn't be warped, the bases should be smooth and flat and the edges should be sharp and unbroken.

The length of ski you choose should depend on your weight and experience. For beginners, short skis are easier to turn than longer ones. As you become more proficient, you'll probably want to go faster and so progress to longer skis. As a rough guide, first-timers generally do best with skis which reach between nose level and the top of the head when held vertically.

■ Boots for downhill skiing are big, heavy and rigid. Spend time getting a comfortable fit: there should be enough space for your toes to move freely, but it's important that they're not so big that your heels slide up and down; there should be no pressure points, but they shouldn't be too loose at the top or your shins can become sore and chafed.

■ Bindings, which clamp your ski boot firmly to the ski at the heel and toe, are the most crucial item for safety — they will release automatically when you fall hard, to protect your legs and knees from injury. The ski hire mechanic will adjust them correctly for your weight and experience — a less experienced skier will have a lighter release setting. Make sure the bindings release properly and have them readjusted if you change boots.

■ Brakes connect with bindings and spring out like prongs which dig into the snow when the boot releases after a fall. It's essential to have brakes or straps attached to your skis to prevent them plunging downhill and endangering other skiers.

■ To help you balance, you'll also need ski poles, which have a handle at the top and a 'basket' near the bottom to stop them sinking into the snow. To judge the right length in the shop, turn the pole upside down with the top touching the floor; your elbow should be bent at right angles when you grasp the pole under the basket.

Preparing for skiing means more than getting the necessary clothing and equipment. If you're not prepared physically, you may tire easily, strain muscles and spend a lot of your holiday stiff and aching. Ideally, at least a couple of months before you go, you should build up your strength and stamina with regular exercise to make you more agile and reduce your chances of injury.

MAPPING IT OUT

Before heading off for the slopes, it's a good idea to get a map of the ski lifts and runs (see photo below). This should show you the number and type of ski lifts, the difficulty of the ski runs and the location of mountain restaurants and facilities.

The difficulty of the runs is shown by colour, both on the map and on trail markers. Most Australian resorts use an international trail-marking system: a green circle indicates an easy run, suitable for beginners, a blue square a more difficult one and a black diamond the most difficult.

Keep the map with you so you can plan your day. If you're unfamiliar with a run, check with ski patrollers, instructors or lift operators to ensure you'll be able to cope with the terrain.



SAFETY ON THE SLOPES

- Before setting out, make sure you're dressed warmly and prepared for any weather changes.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before skiing as this accelerates the loss of body heat.
- Don't ski when tired.
- Stick to marked trails and on slopes that are suitable for your ability.
- Don't stop where you're obstructing a trail or can't be seen by people who may be approaching.
- Take note of the trail markers and look uphill before setting off to ensure you don't collide with another skier.
- If there's an accident, place a pair of skis in an X position above the injured person and notify the ski patrol or nearest lift operator.
- If you're cross-country skiing, tell someone where you're going and when you expect to return, or leave a note on the dashboard of your car. Carry a good map and a whistle.
- Avoid skiing alone, particularly in remote areas. Never ski off-piste (off prepared trails) on your own; these areas are not patrolled so you ski them at your own risk.
- Be aware of the signs of hypothermia (lowering of body temperature below the normal range); exhaustion, poor co-ordination, vagueness and irrational behaviour. Hypothermia can be fatal but can be prevented by proper protection from cold, wind and moisture, adequate food and drink and resting when tired.
- Taking out ambulance cover is recommended. If you're injured on the slopes, it can cost a small fortune to be transported to hospital.
- Toboggan on designated areas only. Use only moulded plastic toboggans (which you can hire cheaply at your resort); don't use plastic bags and metal plates, as they can jolt the spine and cause serious injuries. Only one person should be on the toboggan at a time.

A downhill resort guide

NEW SOUTH WALES

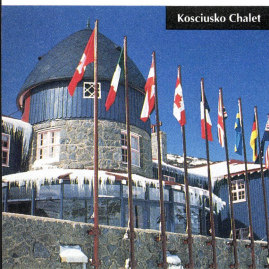
Charlotte Pass

- Located 8 km from Perisher, 520 km from Sydney.
- Ski area: 50 ha.
- Altitude: 1770 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 10%, intermediate – 80%, advanced – 10%.
- Number of lifts: 5.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$56/\$34 (includes snowcat from Perisher and lunch); half-day – \$45/\$24; five days – included in accommodation; seniors (over 65) – children's prices.
- Kosciusko Chalet bookings: phone (064) 57 5245.

Situated near Mt Kosciusko, Charlotte Pass village is Australia's highest ski resort. In winter it's accessible only by oversnow transport (snowcat) from Perisher. It's particularly suitable for new and intermediate skiers and those who enjoy cross-country skiing.

The resort has 12 lodges, but its centerpiece is the charming old Kosciusko Chalet, built in 1930. Families are well catered for at the Chalet, with free childcare six days a week for guests with children aged three and over.

This is a good place for getting away from it all. If you hanker temporarily for the livelier Perisher scene, bear in mind that although the snowcat is included in the package price for arriving and departing guests, extra trips will cost you \$44 return.



Kosciusko Chalet

Mount Selwyn

- Located around 500 km from Sydney, 45 km from Adaminaby.
- Ski area: 45 ha.
- Altitude: 1492 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 40%, intermediate – 48%, advanced – 12%.
- Number of lifts: 12.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$25/\$15; half-day – \$20/\$12; five days – \$125/\$75; seniors (over 65) – free; day lift + lesson – \$40/\$30; lesson only – \$15.
- Information: phone (064) 54 9488.

Mount Selwyn is a small, uncrowded resort which offers inexpensive family skiing. It is most suitable for beginners and intermediate skiers, as well as those interested in cross-country skiing. Prices for day lift tickets are the cheapest in NSW and Victoria.

Facilities are more basic than those found in the larger resorts: there's a shop and cafeteria, a shelter for cross-country skiers and ample free parking, but no overnight accommodation. The closest place to stay is Adaminaby. Packages including accommodation, ski hire, ski lifts and transport are available. There's also a bus service from Adaminaby.

Perisher Blue

- Located around 500 km from Sydney, 600 km from Melbourne and 32 km from Jindabyne.
- Ski area: 1250 ha.
- Altitude: 1680 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 22%, intermediate – 60%, advanced – 18%.
- Number of lifts: 50.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$56/\$28; half-day – \$46/\$23; five days – \$235/\$120; seniors (over 65) – half price on most tickets; day lift + lesson – \$56/\$44 (beginners), \$70/\$44 (all lifts); lesson only – \$29.
- Information: phone 1800 654 681.

Newly created this year, Perisher Blue is an amalgamation of four existing resorts: Perisher, Smiggins, Blue Cow and Guthega. You can ski all four resorts on a single day lift ticket. Perisher Blue is the largest resort in the southern hemisphere and one of the largest in the world. It also has the largest ski and snow board school in Australia (with 250 instructors).



Perisher chairlift

Altogether the area has 50 lifts with an uphill lifting capacity of 47,000 people an hour. A new quad chairlift links Perisher with Blue Cow and Guthega and opens up previously inaccessible ski slopes. Green (easy) and blue (intermediate) runs now link all areas. There's a wide variety of downhill runs suitable for all skiing levels. In addition, the area has 104 km of cross-country ski trails, 58 km of them groomed (packed down by machines).

The valley is at a higher altitude than Thredbo's lower slopes, so snow cover is more reliable. The valley area around Smiggins and Perisher, where most restaurants, bars, shops and lodgings are found (there's no accommodation at Blue Cow), can get very crowded, with long lift queues, especially for the short beginners' runs. This rambling resort covers such a vast area, it's worthwhile exploring beyond the busy valley terminals.

Ski lifts and the Skitube (cog/rack railway) provide easy access to Mount Blue Cow (with lifts connecting Blue Cow and Guthega). The Skitube winds up through 6.5 km of tunnels from Bullocks Flat (18 km from Jindabyne) to Perisher in 10 minutes and on to Blue Cow in another five. It costs \$22 return for adults and \$11 for children (including a national park day entry fee). If you buy a Perisher Blue day lift ticket, the Skitube costs an extra \$5.

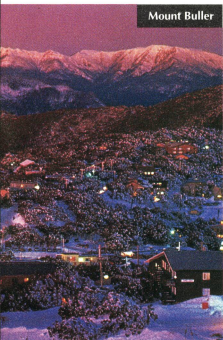
Perisher, Smiggins and Guthega have free parking areas, but you can't leave your car at Perisher or Smiggins overnight: night parking is available at the Skitube entrance at Bullocks Flat or at Sawpit Creek, midway between Jindabyne and Perisher.

Thredbo

- Located around 500 km from Sydney or Melbourne (via the Alpine Way), 37 km from Jindabyne.
- Ski area: 175 ha.
- Altitude: 1365 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 34%, intermediate – 52%, advanced – 14%.
- Number of lifts: 12.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$56/\$30; half-day – \$47/\$25; five days – \$245/\$130; seniors (over 65) – \$8 per day or \$32 for season; day lift + lesson – \$56/\$50 (beginners), \$70/\$56 (all lifts); lesson only – \$29.
- Information: phone 1800 020 589.

A compact, European-style alpine village, Thredbo has a reputation as a sophisticated, glitzy and expensive resort, with a great apres-ski scene, plenty of bars and restaurants, and some of the longest and steepest ski runs in the country (when there's sufficient snow). A 5.7 km trail leads from the highest lifted point (2037 m) to the valley (a vertical drop of 672 m). Sixty hectares of Thredbo's 175-hectare ski area can be covered by manufactured snow, which means you can now usually ski from the top of the mountain to the valley. There are runs for advanced skiers, but intermediates and beginners are also catered for. Free parking is available in the village.

Mount Buller



VICTORIA

Falls Creek

- Located 356 km from Melbourne, 690 km from Sydney, 30 km from Mount Easby.
- Ski area: 451 ha.
- Altitude: 1500 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 27%, intermediate – 33%, advanced – 40%.
- Number of lifts: 21.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$52/\$26; half-day – \$38/\$19; five days – \$220/\$110; seniors (65–70) – half price, over 70 – free; day lift + lesson – \$47/\$36 (beginners), \$73/\$49 (all lifts); lesson only – \$26.
- Information: phone 1800 033 079.

You can ski down the streets of picturesque Falls Creek village and to and from your lodge and the ski lifts. New ski areas have recently been opened and now the resort has over 90 runs for all skiing levels. It's also an excellent base for cross-country skiing. There's a variety of accommodation, restaurants and bars and two licensed supermarkets.

Mount Baw Baw

- Located 160 km from Melbourne.
- Ski area: 25 ha.
- Altitude: 1460 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 65%, intermediate – 30%, advanced – 5%.
- Number of lifts: 8.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$38/\$19; half-day – \$34/\$17; five days – \$165/\$80; seniors (65–70) – half price, over 70 – free; day lift + lesson – \$52/\$33; lesson only – \$20/\$17.
- Information: phone (051) 65 1136.

Although Baw Baw is the closest downhill ski resort to Melbourne, it doesn't draw the crowds (and lift queues) that the larger resorts do—it has only a small ski area with gentle slopes most suited to beginners. It also offers cross-country skiing. Accommodation is available (mainly in private lodges), but it's an easy day trip from Melbourne. You'll need to drive; there's no bus service.

Mount Buffalo

- Located 320 km from Melbourne.
- Ski area: 27 ha.
- Altitude: 1525 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 45%, intermediate – 35%, advanced – 20%.
- Number of lifts: 7.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$32/\$17; half-day – \$19/\$13; five days – \$128/\$58; day lift + lesson – \$32/\$20 (beginners), \$46/\$27 (all lifts); lesson only – \$19/\$14.
- Information: phone (057) 55 1988.

A small, relaxed, family-owned resort, with short, easy ski runs, Mount Buffalo is aimed at families and beginners. It's promoted as being friendly and affordable. A range of accommodation (including budget dormitories) is available at the Tatra Inn and the Mount Buffalo Chalet, built in 1909.

Mount Buller

- Located 240 km from Melbourne and 47 km from Mansfield.
- Ski area: 160 ha.
- Altitude: 1600 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 25%, intermediate – 45%, advanced – 30%.
- Number of lifts: 26.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$52/\$29; half-day – \$40/\$19; five days – \$220/\$109; seniors (65–70) – half price for members of Over 65s Club (\$50 membership fee); over 70 – \$25 for season; day lift + lesson – \$59/\$48 (beginners), \$72/\$48 (all lifts); lesson only – \$26.
- Information: phone 1800 039 049.

Mount Buller is Victoria's most popular resort, with a wide variety of ski runs (from beginner to expert), lifts, accommodation (7000 beds), shops, restaurants, nightspots and activities (including indoor ice-skating). It's only a three hour drive from Melbourne, so it can be crowded, particularly on weekends. However, lift queues usually move quickly, thanks to its eight quad chairlifts. Altogether Mount Buller's 26 lifts can carry 39,500 skiers an hour. The bustling, beginners' Bourke Street run is floodlit on Wednesdays and Saturdays for night skiing.

Mount Hotham

- Located 365 km from Melbourne via Bright or 455 km via Omeo, 55 km from Bright or Omeo.
- Ski area: 65 ha (patrolled).
- Altitude: 1750 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 17%, intermediate – 53%, advanced – 30%.
- Number of lifts: 9.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$51/\$25; half-day – \$38/\$18; five days – \$214/\$109; seniors (over 65) – half price, over 70 – free; day lift + lesson – \$35/\$25 (beginners), \$69/\$43 (all lifts); lesson only – \$24/\$20.
- Information: phone (057) 59 3550 or 1800 032 061.

Mount Hotham village sits near the top of the mountain. Because of its altitude, it has reliable snowfalls and you can ski to the lifts from your lodge. It's also known for good powder and off-piste skiing (in areas where the snow hasn't been packed down by machines).

This year a new intermediate ski area has been opened, and a giant snow bridge has been constructed over the alpine road which previously sliced through the middle of the village, so you can now ski without stopping from the top of the mountain to the valley and be brought back up again with a new quad chairlift.

An 11 km trail (and a free coach shuttle service) links Mount Hotham with Dinner Plain resort, which has a number of cross-country trails and one beginners' lift for downhillers, as well as a selection of accommodation.

DISABLED DISCOUNTS

If you're disabled and yearn to ski, consider joining the Australian Disabled Skiers' Federation (ADSF). The \$40 membership fee will entitle you to a 50% discount on the cost of lift tickets and ski lessons in all Australian ski resorts.

The ADSF can also arrange for special ski equipment to be ready for you in the resort. Many members are amputees, who ski on one ski and two outriggers; some are paraplegics, who can use 'sit-skis'; while others are blind, intellectually disabled or have other debilitating illnesses such as MS, polio or cerebral palsy.

The ADSF has also built a lodge, specially designed for disabled skiers, in the NSW subalpine town of Jindabyne. It consists of two self-contained units, each accommodating up to 10 people and costing \$120 per night.

ADSF director, Ron Finneran says a growing number of ski lodges are being built with the needs of disabled skiers in mind. In addition, lift operators in all resorts are now trained to help disabled people on and off lifts, if they require assistance. There are also instructors at most resorts qualified in teaching disabled skiers.

For more information about the ADSF, write to 15 Beverley St, Merimbula 2548.

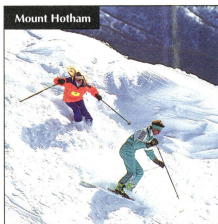
TASMANIA

Tasmanian ski areas have less reliable snow cover and a shorter season (usually from July to September) because of their lower altitude. They have limited facilities and slope grooming compared with NSW and Victorian resorts. Runs are generally suitable for beginners and intermediates and the ski scene is very low-key. Its two downhill areas also cater for cross-country skiers (with instruction available). You probably wouldn't travel to Tasmania solely for a ski holiday.

Ben Lomond

- Located 60 km from Launceston.
- Ski area: 25 ha.
- Altitude: 1430 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 35%, intermediate – 65%.
- Number of lifts: 8.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$25/\$10 (for the six lifts operated by Alpine Enterprises) and \$20/\$10 (for the two Tas Ski lifts); half-day – \$10; seniors (over 65) – free; day lift + lesson – \$59/\$40; lesson only – \$26.
- Information: phone (003) 72 2444.

The resort includes a hotel, which offers food and accommodation, club lodges, ski hire, ski school and a kiosk. Of the eight drag lifts, six are operated by Alpine Enterprises and two by Tas Ski Lifts — you have to buy separate tickets from each lift company.



Mount Mawson

- Located 95 km from Hobart.
- Ski area: 5 ha.
- Altitude: 1210 m.
- Runs suitable for: beginners – 35%, intermediate – 65%.
- Number of lifts: 4.
- Lift tickets (adults/children): Day – \$18/\$15; half-day – \$10/\$8; seniors (over 65) – free; lesson – \$15.
- Information: phone (002) 88 1149.

Located in the Mount Field National Park, Mount Mawson has ski hire, a ski school, a heated shelter and a kiosk. Limited accommodation, mainly in club lodges, is available. To get to the ski area (served by four drag lifts — if there's enough snow), you have to walk about half an hour uphill from the carpark.

NEW ZEALAND

Situated at a higher altitude than their Australian counterparts, the New Zealand alps have a longer ski season and a consistent cover of good quality snow. The mountains are bigger and more rugged, and there's a wider variety of skiing possibilities. You can ski on both the North and South Island; altogether there are 12 commercial ski areas, one Nordic cross-country area, 12 club ski fields which are open to the public and a host of helicopter and glacier skiing opportunities. It's not possible to describe each resort in this article.

Partly because of the favourable currency exchange rate, the cost of a week's ski holiday in New Zealand is not much more than one in Australia, even with the trans-Tasman airfare included. From about A\$850 per person (twin share) you can have a week's ski holiday in New Zealand, including a lift pass for five days, accommodation and return air fare.

Most accommodation is in nearby towns rather than in the ski areas, but ski tour operators (based in Australia) can arrange daily shuttles to and from the snow as part of your holiday package. There are many non-skiing activities available if you choose, say, a holiday in Queenstown in the Southern Alps, including white-water rafting, jet boating and bungy jumping.

You can now fly direct from Sydney to Queenstown (less than three hours' flying time). For information on ski packages call the NZ Ski Hotline on 1 902 260 558. Calls are charged at 50 cents a minute.

Kangaroo meat: the arguments

With kangaroo meat now legally available for human consumption in all Australian states and territories, we have the option of eating our national symbol. However, not everyone thinks it's such a good idea.

We don't think stuffed kangaroo meat like that pictured, or roo mince or sausages, should be eaten rare. Bacteria can find their way into the middle of these products, and thorough cooking is needed to ensure they're killed.



THE LEGALISATION OF THE SALE of kangaroo game meat for human consumption has met with strong protests from animal welfare and conservation groups. They argue that kangaroo harvesting is cruel and unsustainable, and that kangaroo game meat poses a health hazard.

The kangaroo meat industry and state conservation agencies say these arguments are out of date, and that the industry has become much more professional in the past few years. Kangaroo meat, they say, is a healthy alternative to conventional meats.

In this article we look at kangaroo

meat as food for human consumption. We cover the animal rights issues in *Kangaroo rights* on page 14, and the conservation issues in *Kangaroos and conservation* on page 15.

Human consumption of kangaroo meat is not new. It has been part of the traditional Aboriginal diet for thousands of years. Early European settlers also hunted and ate kangaroo meat, as have people in rural communities since then.

A commercial kangaroo meat industry was set up in 1959 after expressions of interest from European game meat buyers. This attempt at kangaroo game meat export failed because of poor product quality, poor handling and packaging techniques, and the lack of government controls. Kangaroo processors then began to develop a domestic market for the meat as pet food, which is still its main end use today.

Commercial harvesting of kangaroo game meat for human consumption on the domestic market takes place in NSW, SA, and WA. Wallabies are harvested in Tasmania. Queensland recently introduced regulations permitting the harvesting of kangaroo game meat. The five most common species are commercially harvested: whiptail wallabies, wallaroos, eastern grey kangaroos, western grey kangaroos and red kangaroos.

Kangaroo game meat has been legally sold in the NT, the ACT, Tasmania and SA for some years. More recently, NSW, Victoria, WA and Queensland have also allowed its sale.

The meat

Kangaroo is considered a game meat because it is hunted rather than farmed. Most kangaroo cuts sold for human consumption come from the hindquarters. A range of cuts is available, including striploin fillet, tenderloin fillet, loin fillet, racks, saddle (porterhouse), and bone-in and boneless legs. So-called 'value-added' products such as meat diced for goulash, sausages and mince are also available. Prices compare well to those of other game meats, and are sometimes cheaper than comparable cuts of premium low-fat meats.

Kangaroo game meat has a very low total fat content and a high proportion of polyunsaturated fatty acids compared with meat from cattle or sheep. The National Heart Foundation (NHF) has granted it a 'tick' of approval because of its low fat content.

Marita Grundy, a dietitian/nutrition-

ist with the NHF, says kangaroo meat is "arguably the leanest meat". The Foundation has tested a number of kangaroo cuts which contained less than 2% fat.

"It is a very, very lean meat, even compared to lean beef, trim lamb or skinless chicken. Along with venison, it is one of the trimmest, lowest-fat meats, with the added benefit of iron and zinc".

Kerin O'Dea, Pro-vice Chancellor of Research at Deakin University in Victoria, has conducted studies into the health aspects of kangaroo meat. They have shown that both Aborigines and Australians of European origin on low-fat diets rich in kangaroo meat show a reduction in risk factors associated with cardiovascular disease. The availability of kangaroo meat, argues O'Dea, increases the options for people on low-cholesterol

diets who want to continue eating red meat.

Is it safe?

Kangaroos that are shot for human consumption are disembowelled in the field, and taken directly to either a processing plant or chiller.

However, because kangaroos are harvested in such a different way from domesticated animals, there are some groups who doubt the quality of kangaroo meat.

Recent news reports about a suspected virus causing blindness in kangaroos have heightened public concerns about the safety of kangaroo meat. CSIRO and NSW, SA and Victorian government departments are currently conducting research to establish whether it is in fact

a virus causing the problem, and whether it can be transmitted to humans.

At the time of going to print, the research was incomplete. Conservationists were claiming the suspected virus could possibly be a human health risk whereas the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service considered the risk to human health minimal. We will keep you informed of new developments.

The Australian Wildlife Protection Council also believes there are a number of other reasons why kangaroo game meat is dangerous. They argue that:

■ Kangaroos suffer from internal and external parasites and a range of diseases, such as salmonellosis, coxiella, sarcocystis, fasciola hepatic flukes, nematodes, hydatid cysts and subcutaneous and musculature cysts.

KANGAROO RIGHTS

ANIMAL RIGHTS AND CONSERVATION GROUPS operate on the basic premise that wildlife has an intrinsic right to exist.

For example, the Australian Conservation Foundation believes that: "All wildlife has intrinsic value and therefore has a *prima facie* right to exist independently of human needs. Kangaroo management must maintain the status of kangaroo as a wildlife species."

This sentiment is echoed by the Australians Against Commercialisation of Wildlife, who say, "Wildlife does have intrinsic rights."

Whether you think a kangaroo has an intrinsic value depends on your personal beliefs. However, most people would agree that animals have a right not to suffer unnecessarily, and that is the main issue driving the kangaroo rights debate.

The most humane way of killing a kangaroo is to shoot it in the brain; death is virtually instantaneous.

A 1985 RSPCA report into the incidence of kangaroo cruelty found that 85% of commercially killed kangaroos were head-shot, leaving about 15% (which would be 540,000 based on 1995 quota figures of 3.6 million) which would die painfully.

To overcome this problem, a Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos was issued by the Council of Nature Conservation Ministers in 1985. Under this, the primary objective when shooting a kangaroo is to "achieve instantaneous loss of consciousness and rapid death without regaining consciousness". The code sets out the manner in which the kangaroo must be shot, the point of aim, and the minimum specifications for firearms and ammunition. Guidelines for "dispatching" wounded kangaroos and pouch young are also given. Animal welfare groups do not believe these guidelines are humane.

According to Ray Davis, president of the Kangaroo Industries Association, the industry has become more

professional since that original RSPCA report and the introduction of the code of practice. "Professional shooters now achieve a 98% clean kill rate," he says.

This view is shared by John Everleigh, heritage manager for the National Parks and Wildlife western NSW region, who says that most professional shooters are good shots and use well maintained weapons.

"Of the shooters we have checked, they have all proved to be excellent shots," he says. "Processors tend not to take, or pay less for, kangaroos that have not been head-shot. There is an economic advantage for kangaroo shooters to be good shots."

"Since the RSPCA report in 1985, guidelines have been tightened up. In that respect, it is out of date."

Animal rights and conservation groups believe that, despite the code of practice and reassurances from those in the industry, large numbers of kangaroos still suffer unnecessarily. Even if the claimed 98% clean kill rate is correct, that still leaves 72,000 kangaroos wounded or dying painfully, based on 1995 quota figures.

In addition, "We have no reason to believe anyone is complying with the code of practice," says the national director of

the Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies, Glenys Oogies. "It's not even enforceable. In 1985, the industry said its clean kill rate was 96%. The RSPCA found it to be 85%. We don't think their claims are credible; there is no reason to think things have changed."

The federation is especially concerned about at-foot joeys which might get away before the shooter has a chance to destroy them. Oogies says these joeys are either killed by predators, or die from exposure.

"It is not in the interest of a commercial shooter to worry about at-foot joeys, because it is difficult and time-consuming to catch them."



Does a kangaroo or wallaby have intrinsic value, regardless of human needs? Or is it just a question of being sure they're killed humanely?

■ Kangaroos cannot be mustered, herded, yarded or transported, so they can't be slaughtered in conventional abattoirs under proper supervision.

■ Kangaroos can't be provided with the same levels of animal husbandry as domesticated stock to reduce natural levels of disease and/or parasitism.

■ Delays between killing and cool storing can't be monitored to ensure the quality and safety of the carcass.

The kangaroo meat industry, on the other hand, is confident about the quality of the meat now produced.

"The industry has cleaned itself up," says Kangaroo Industries Association president Ray Davis. "There are very strict inspections of meat for human consumption."

Every state where kangaroo game meat is harvested has also introduced its own codes which regulate how it is harvested and processed. These are designed to ensure it is safe for humans to eat.

In an attempt to unify state laws, the National Food Authority has recently released a national standard for game meat for human consumption.

The differences in regulations between the various states have resulted in some potential problems. In SA, for example, the kangaroo meat industry developed without formal or consistent operating standards.

The South Australian government has now addressed this issue and has included kangaroo meat in the new Meat Hygiene Act 1994. According to South Australia's chief meat hygiene officer, Robin Vandegraaff, "The problems have been addressed. One might have questioned kangaroo meat harvested prior to the new Act. Since its introduction, I am confident that the standards of production of kangaroo meat ensure there is minimal risk to human health."

By comparison, NSW developed a comprehensive code of practice before

commercial kangaroo game meat harvesting even started.

The issue of quality and hygiene monitoring of all meats is in itself another issue; one which CHOICE is watching carefully. Given our concerns over meat inspection systems in Australia, we can't say with certainty that the existing system is 100% foolproof — particularly in the difficult area of kangaroo meat where experts can't inspect the kangaroos before they are killed.

Where is it available?

If you'd like to try kangaroo meat, the easiest way is to go to a restaurant — they're still the biggest buyers.

If you'd like to try cooking kangaroo meat yourself, you can buy it from specialty game meat butchers and delicatessens. Some regular butchers also sell it.

Of the major supermarkets, Franklins sells it through its Big Fresh outlets in NSW, Queensland and Victoria. Coles and Woolworths sell it in SA only. □

KANGAROOS AND CONSERVATION

KANGAROOS ARE A PROTECTED SPECIES, and a permit is required to kill them. Kangaroos in national parks, reserves and state forests can't be shot.

In areas where kangaroos are considered a threat to agriculture, the state conservation authority may prepare a kangaroo management program.

These programs may allow for the commercial and/or non-commercial 'harvesting' of kangaroos and wallabies. Products from commercial harvests can be sold throughout Australia, but only if the kangaroo management program is approved by the Commonwealth minister responsible for the environment.

In effect, state conservation agencies use the commercial kangaroo industry as a tool to control kangaroo numbers, especially in areas where they may cause damage to agriculture.

Anyone wishing to kill kangaroos must have a permit from the state or territory conservation agency. Products from kangaroos killed by non-commercial hunters can't be sold. State wildlife authorities control the actual number of kangaroos shot by issuing plastic tags which must be attached to every carcass.

Conservation and wildlife groups are concerned that commercially driven kangaroo harvesting may lead to kangaroos becoming endangered. They question the accuracy of kangaroo population surveys, and cite other examples of Australian animals such as the toolache wallaby and Tasmanian tiger, which have become extinct through overhunting.

They are also concerned that because there is a bias towards killing larger animals, commercial killing of kangaroos

"undermines the process of natural selection". They argue that while this selective harvesting may allow the species to maintain its population numbers, it does not ensure that the most suitable individuals continue the species — the fittest will have been killed, leaving a genetically inferior population to breed.

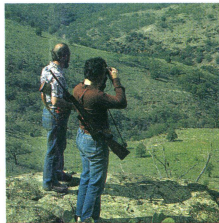
On the other hand, Professor Gordon Grigg, from the Department of Zoology at the University of Queensland, has argued for some years that soft-footed kangaroos destined for human consumption should replace heavy hard-hoofed sheep and cattle on agricultural properties:

"The reduction or elimination of sheep from an area would lead to an improvement in the vegetation, reduced soil erosion and higher and more stable populations of kangaroos."

This form of 'ranching' is already planned for Tasmania, using wallabies instead of kangaroos. John Kelly of Lenah Game Meats says he is working with several farmers to reduce sheep numbers on their properties and allow wallaby numbers to increase. They will manage

these areas for wallabies — for example by planting crops specifically for wallabies to graze on during winter.

However, Peter Preuss, the national president of the Australian Wildlife Protection Council, says kangaroo farming is just not commercially viable. He cites longer reproduction cycles, low meat yields and lack of species knowledge as reasons for this.



Should kangaroo management programs protect conventional agriculture from damage — or could roos replace more environmentally damaging sheep and cattle?

Boarding a train or bus, playing sport, going out with friends or on holiday are things most Australians take for granted. Yet for people with a disability, these basic rights have often been out of reach — until now. New disability laws and building regulations recognise the rights of people with disabilities to participate fully in society. We look at how these laws may help you, and suggest some access support services.

Your right to access



Some retail outlets and shopping centres — like Myer in Melbourne, pictured — have built in design considerations for older people and those with disabilities. They're reaping the rewards of their investment as more people take advantage of these facilities and decide to shop there.

The law and your rights

NEARLY 20% OF THE POPULATION are disabled (with one or more restrictions, limitations or impairments). Of these, 1.8 million (or 10%) have mobility limitations. People with disabilities also have the lowest employment rates, with unemployment for those aged between 15 and 65 running at a huge 54%.

If you are one of these people, there are some new laws that may hold out the promise of a better quality of life. State anti-discrimination laws, the 1992 federal Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), and the passage of amendments to the Federal Building Code of Australia have made access to any public place, information, finance or service a legislated right. If you have a disability you can now — in theory at least — choose how, when and where you travel and you have the right to demand governments provide accessible public transport.

These laws in combination mean that all public places (existing or under construction) and all services and facilities (including toilets, lift buttons and signals) should be made accessible, and that you should not be restricted to just one area of a building if you have a disability. The only exception to these new laws is if they create "unjustifiable hardship" for those who would have to make the changes.

Unfortunately the new DDA is complaints-driven. It places the onus directly on those it is supposed to support to prove they've been discriminated against. Even so, there have been some outstanding wins for disabled consumers who have taken governments and businesses to task for their failure to comply with the law.

Battles in the war for access

The NSW, Queensland and SA governments have all appeared before the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC) — and lost. As a result, the construction of a railway station at the University of Newcastle was stopped because it wouldn't have been accessible to disabled users, the production of 178 non-accessible buses (worth

\$78 million) in SA was halted, and the Queensland Government was forced to fix an access problem it had created when it constructed 17 steps leading up to the new \$7.5 million cultural arts centre. (See *On the buses*, right, for more on one of these successful campaigns.)

While these are some of the most publicised cases of individuals and organisations using the new disability laws, the legislation can also facilitate access to a variety of services. HREOC has successfully conciliated for: a superannuation policy for a woman with multiple sclerosis (MS) that allows death and disability coverage for conditions not related to MS; compensation for inconvenience and lost wages for a man who was denied employment because of a previous back injury; modifications to a club to allow access for a wheelchair-user member; and access to a public school for a student who had been forced to travel some distance to attend a special school for disabled students.

As a result of disputes like these, the NSW, NT and SA governments and some industries are developing action plans or initiatives to make public transport more accessible. In total, HREOC is currently dealing with approximately 600 complaints against government and private corporations that have failed to conform to disability legislation.

If you're denied access, who do you call?

If you're discriminated against you can get confidential advice over the phone from or make a complaint to HREOC. To make a complaint you need to state that you have been discriminated against because of your disability, what happened, when and where it happened and who was involved. Complaints should normally be in writing but you can use any language and, if you have difficulty writing, the Commission can give you help. Statements to the Commission can also be given in braille, on video or audio tape, through an advocate or verbally. The Commission can supply community or sign language interpreters and information on where to get advocacy support.

Once a complaint has been lodged, the Commission will decide whether it comes under the Disability Discrimination Act. If it does, the Commission will write to the other person or organisation to get their story, conduct an investigation if necessary and help work out a

ON THE BUSES

When Melissa Madsen, Maurice Corcoran and Judy Thompson took the South Australian Government to court after the latter transgressed the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) with the purchase order of 178 buses that wouldn't be accessible for people with mobility limitations, they had one advocate as their legal representative. "Our resources were limited and we acted as our own researchers," Melissa said. "There was a row of men in suits versus us giving evidence."

Despite the odds, Melissa and her co-complainants achieved a major victory in October last year when the South Australian Government agreed to make the first 50 buses accessible for people with disabilities. The government, in consultation with people with disabilities, is also developing a long-term action plan that will ensure the SA public transport system will comply with the DDA.

As well as the gains for the 100,000-odd Adelaide residents with reduced mobility, the outcome of the hearing will be felt Australia-wide. Representatives of public and private transport operators throughout Australia said they would now urgently address the needs of people with disabilities.



Photo: Iain Willoughby, Flinders University

solution acceptable to both sides. You can go through the conciliation process with or without a solicitor and you can also be supported by an advocate, friend or organisation. If the complaint isn't resolved at the conciliation stage it can go to a public hearing. HREOC offices are in every state capital city and their phone numbers can be found in your local telephone directory.

The Commonwealth Government also funds the following legal advocacy support services, which can give you legal advice, information or advocacy.

ACT

Welfare Rights Legal Centre
PO Box 337, Civic Square 2608
Phone (06) 247 2177, fax (06) 257 4801

New South Wales

NSW Disability Discrimination Legal Centre
Shop 99/1-5 Meeks St, Kingsford 2032
Phone 1800 800 708, (02) 313 6000,
TTY 1800 644 419, (02) 313 7190,
fax (02) 662 1364

Northern Territory

Darwin Community Legal Service
17 Peel St, Darwin 0801
Phone or fax (089) 41 1339

Queensland

Cairns Community Legal Centre
128 Martyn St, Parramatta Park
(PO Box 6117), Cairns 4870
Phone (070) 31 7688, fax (070) 41 2134,
TTY (070) 31 7179

Welfare Rights Legal Centre

99 Gregory Terrace, Spring Hill,
Brisbane 4000
Phone (07) 832 2922, fax (07) 832 2891

South Australia

Norwood Community Legal Centre
110 The Parade, Norwood 5067
Phone 1800 066 019, (08) 362 1199,
fax (08) 362 0410

Tasmania

Launceston Community Legal Centre
4A George St, Launceston 7250
Phone (003) 34 1577, fax (003) 31 5237

Victoria

Victorian Disability Discrimination Law Advocacy Service, 11th floor,
343 Little Collins St, Melbourne 3000
Phone (03) 602 4877, fax (03) 602 4948

Western Australia

Sussex Street Community Law Centre
Locked Bag 2, East Victoria Park,
Perth 6101.
Phone (09) 470 2676, fax (09) 470 1805

Who else can help?

FOR PRACTICAL EVERYDAY LIVING assistance we regularly mention Independent Living Centres — their occupational therapists assess our test products on behalf of people with disabilities. We also regularly mention Technical Aid to the Disabled (TAD) and IDEAS: Information on Disability Equipment Access Services. We last discussed them in detail in *Equipped for an easier life* in the November 1994 issue. (There's an Independent Living Centre in all state capitals except the NT. If you need help with a special aid or piece of equipment, you can contact TAD in your state or local area. Call IDEAS on 008 029 904.)

Some other technological and government innovations can help open up the world a bit more — and even start you on your own crusade for better access!

The super highway

If you have a computer and a modem (and someone to help you set them up and get them running if you're not familiar with computers), you can now communicate with others through OZ_ABLED. This public bulletin board is designed to act as a forum for debate between individuals and organisations, to provide support, offer information that could help improve people's circumstances, organise meetings and events and make useful contacts.

It's well equipped to promote communication since geography, lack of transport and communications difficulties are not barriers. Best of all, it can help disability consumer groups become a more powerful lobby for the cost of a local phone call, regardless of where you call. According to OZ_ABLED designers, all you need to have are:

- Moderate spelling skills, some keyboard skills, and the ability to follow simple instructions, or someone to assist you.

- A computer and modem. If cash is short, secondhand ones will do. Some computers are retailing for as low as \$150, and you can pick up a slow modem for as little as \$20. If you're hoping to equip an advocacy agency, you may



An action holiday or playing sport may seem a dream for many people with a disability, but various organisations can help the dream come true — see *Need a holiday?*, right.

be entitled to state or Commonwealth Government financial support.

- You'll also need a computer communications program, and OZ_ABLED recommends Telix. If you don't know anyone who can install a program onto your computer, try Technical Aid to the Disabled — the volunteer organisation operates in all states. OZ_ABLED also uses an amateur network system called Fidonet to connect users.

- Once your computer makes contact with the bulletin board system (BBS), it will instruct you to type your name, choose a password and select whether you want to read or leave a message.

- For the vision-impaired, there are programs that blow up screen sections or voice synthesisers that translate written data into sound.

Although OZ_ABLED is meant to be for discussing disability issues, dinner recipes have been known to exchange between users through the bulletin board. But remember, everything you write is public and can be seen right across Australia, so don't be defamatory!

Once you get into the bulletin board system, there are other electronic mail conferences such as the North American ABLED, ADA international disability conferences, OZ_Silentalk (for deafness issues) and OZ_TBI_Stroke (for brain injury). There are literally thousands of BBS in Australia, and depending on your interests you can access conferences covering topics as wide-ranging as cooking, politics, chess, health and literature. For more information contact Melissa Mad-

sen and Neville Kennedy on (08) 352 8599.

Some BBS for people with disabilities are:

New South Wales

Level Playing Field (02) 313 4169

Shortwave Possums (02) 651 3055

Queensland

Access Australia (07) 358 4438

Datanet (07) 856 2264

South Australia

Common Ground (08) 223 2131

PC Oracle (08) 234 0791

Tasmania

Bear Necessity (002) 73 1501

Victoria

The Bridge (03) 686 6107

Western Australia

Perth Omen (09) 244 2111

Advocacy and services

Disability resource and information centres can help you with information, complaints and access problems in areas such as employment, transport and education. They can also direct you to other consumer or service organisations, and some can help you find out what government subsidies you're entitled to and what government authority (local or state) you should contact (see *Disability resource and information centres*, right, for some numbers to call).

Some organisations, such as People With Disabilities (NSW) also have employment services for people aged between 15 and 24. Older job-seekers can also use the service, though help is limited.

Maps

Many local councils have created their own maps that can help you locate wheelchair-accessible public telephones, parking stations, street parking, public toilets and toilets within restaurants and buildings. So it's worth contacting your local council or, if you're on holiday, a tourist centre, to get an access map and directory.

Government funding and services

State, territory and Commonwealth governments offer a wide range of services and programs that financially and practically assist people with disabilities. Aids, appliances, no-interest loans for prescribed aids, tax concessions on products you need because of your disability; housekeeping and personal care; meals on wheels and other food services; respite care; community transport; home maintenance and modifications; neighbour aid programs and paramedical services can all be accessed through state or territory health departments, community services departments or local councils, the tax office or GIO Australia offices.

For assistance in employment, education and training, you can contact

your local CES office, the Disability Support Officer at your local DSS or the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service in your area.

Need a holiday?

Choosing a sport or recreation or finding an 'action' holiday can be something of a dream for people with disabilities. This is where NICAN can help. It can refer you to organisations that provide recreation and sport activities — such as abseiling, swimming, scuba diving, wheelchair sports, art classes, camping trips or some other holiday — either for everyone in the community or specifically for people with disabilities.

Most telephone, fax and written enquiries are answered free of charge. If you have an IBM-compatible computer or can access one, you can also subscribe to the NICAN Electronic Directory. As part of the benefits of being a subscriber you can print NICAN records; you receive a list of activities on the directory, a help manual, a newsletter, and you have access to NICAN's 1800 number (below). People with disabilities receive subscription fee discounts.

For more information on the NICAN Electronic Directory contact NICAN by phone on (06) 285 3713 or toll-free on 1800 806 769, fax (06) 285 3714, TTY

(06) 282 4333, or write to them at NICAN, Reply Paid 028, PO Box 407, Curtin ACT 2605.

Emergency wheelchair services

One of the problems wheelchair users can face is the possibility of a wheelchair breakdown. Help is at hand from state automobile clubs or associations.

They provide an emergency wheelchair breakdown service as a community service, except for wheelchair parts (SA, Queensland, NSW, ACT and NT); as part of their existing membership (Tasmania); or special wheelchair user membership that is either free except for parts (WA) or carries a small annual charge (Victoria). Some of these services are limited to major capital cities (SA), only operate during normal business hours (NT) or only cover motorised wheelchairs and scooters (WA).

Although these clubs and associations may only be able to offer limited repair work, most aim to get you going again quickly after minor wheelchair repairs — things like electrical faults, mechanical breakdowns or flat tyres. The telephone number and address of the local automobile club or association branch can be found in your local telephone directory. □

DISABILITY RESOURCE AND INFORMATION CENTRES

State	Organisation	Phone	Fax	TTY
ACT	ACROD (A)	(06) 282 4333	(06) 281 3488	(06) 282 4333
	ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service	(06) 295 0866	(06) 295 0883	
New South Wales	ACROD (A)	(02) 809 4488	(02) 809 6517	
	Disability Information and Referral Centre	(02) 369 3594	(02) 369 3512	(02) 369 3594
	Disability Information Service	(066) 24 4977, 1800 800 340	(066) 24 4989	1800 800 340
	NSW Council for Intellectual Disabilities	(02) 211 1611, 1800 424 065	(02) 211 2606	
	State Library Disability Information Service	(02) 230 1583	(02) 232 4816	(02) 230 1541
Northern Territory	ACROD (A)	(089) 47 0681	(089) 84 4586	
	Disability Worker Department of Health and Community Resources	(089) 22 7301	(089) 22 7477	
Queensland	ACROD (A)	(07) 367 1605	(07) 367 0227	
	Disability Information Awareness Line	(07) 224 8031, 1800 177 120	(07) 224 8037	(07) 224 8031
South Australia	ACROD (A)	(08) 232 2366	(08) 232 2104	
	Disability Information and Resource Centre	(08) 223 7522, 1800 182 179	(08) 223 5082	(08) 223 7579
Tasmania	ACROD (A)	(002) 23 6086	(002) 23 6086	
	Aged and Disability Care Information Service	(002) 24 2322, 1800 806 656	(002) 24 2411	
Victoria	ACROD (A)	(03) 690 2266	(03) 699 5502	
	Disability Resource Centre	(03) 428 8911	(03) 428 9482	(03) 428 6435
	Disabled Persons Information Bureau	(03) 616 7704	(03) 616 8142	
Western Australia	ACROD (A)	(09) 221 9066	(09) 221 9277	(09) 221 9099
	People With Disabilities	(09) 386 6477, 1800 193 331	(09) 386 6705	(09) 386 6451

(A) National Industry Association for Disability Services.



Tampons and toxic shock

The recent death of a 13-year-old Queensland girl from suspected toxic shock syndrome (TSS) has renewed concerns about the safety of tampons. Should women stop using them? Let's put the issue into perspective.

TOXIC SHOCK SYNDROME IS A RARE but serious and sometimes fatal illness. It is most common in menstruating women using tampons but can occur in men and children as well. It's caused by toxins produced by the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* ('golden staph'). Many people carry *S. aureus* harmlessly on their skin and in their nose, and in around 10% of women it may also be found in the vagina.

Staph infection can occur in cuts, surgical wounds, burns, boils, abscesses, abrasions and even insect bites. It's

thought that people who are most susceptible to TSS may not have adequate antibodies to the toxins produced by *S. aureus*; younger people appear most at risk, possibly because resistance to the toxins builds up over time.

Do tampons cause TSS?

Tampons don't cause TSS, but they increase the risk of developing the illness. The only thing we can tell you for sure is the more absorbent the tampon you are using, the greater the risk of getting TSS. It's not known why *S. aureus* bac-

teria sometimes multiply and produce toxins which are absorbed into the bloodstream, nor how the presence of a tampon can contribute to the process.

Extensive research (including a test by CHOICE, published in April 1992) shows unopened tampons don't contain *S. aureus*. However, one suggestion is that inserting a tampon introduces oxygen into the vagina, which encourages the production of toxins. The theory goes that the more absorbent the tampon, the more air is introduced and the greater the potential for developing TSS.

In the US in 1980, an increased frequency of TSS was linked to certain superabsorbent materials used in Rely tampons. This brand was never sold in Australia and has been withdrawn in the US.

You may have been confused by conflicting media reports, some saying women using tampons made from synthetic materials are more likely to develop TSS, others claiming that cotton tampons increase the risk. However, the research is controversial and at the moment there's no clearcut answer.

What is important is the absorbency. You should use the lowest absorbency your menstrual flow can practically handle: the lower the absorbency, the lower the risk, although scientists don't currently understand why.

What are the warning signs?

Symptoms of TSS include a general flu-like malaise, headache, muscular pains, sudden high fever — 39°C or higher — faintness, dizziness, vomiting, diarrhoea and a sunburn-like red rash. One or two weeks after symptoms begin, peeling of the skin may occur.

If you have one or more of the early symptoms of TSS while menstruating and using a tampon, remove it and see your doctor straightaway. Tell them that you are menstruating and using a tampon and you are concerned about TSS. Early detection is vital.

According to medical experts, it generally takes a few days for the toxins to start circulating in the bloodstream. It's

Tampons are big business: Australian women spent \$72 million on 392 million tampons in 1994. Seventy per cent of menstruating women use tampons at some time. Currently warnings on tampon boxes only say using tampons is 'associated with' toxic shock syndrome, but current government proposals are that warnings must also state that TSS 'is a rare but serious disease which can cause death'.



HOW TO REDUCE THE RISK OF TSS

There is a slight risk of developing TSS if you use tampons. If you do use them, to minimise the risk:

- Choose the lowest-absorbency tampon for your comfort and level of blood flow. If removing the tampon causes discomfort because it's not saturated this is a sign you could use a lower absorbency tampon. Use a less absorbent one for lighter flow and toward the end of your period, or if the flow is very light, consider using a pad or panty liner instead. Don't be tempted by the convenience of using a higher-absorbency tampon for a longer period of time.
- Tampons should not be used continuously, and preferably not overnight.
- Wash your hands before (and after) inserting a tampon. Bacteria could be introduced into the vagina from your fingers.
- Don't handle the tampon more than necessary.
- Discard any tampon you may have unwrapped but not used immediately.
- Don't use tampons for spotting or between your periods. Irritation and even ulceration of the vagina is possible if you regularly use tampons when there's no menstrual flow. If you need any protection, use a panty liner.
- Avoid using tampons if you've had TSS, as there's a 30% chance it will recur.
- Be aware of the symptoms of

toxic shock — see *What are the warning signs?*, opposite. They may appear during your period or soon after.

■ If the early warning symptoms develop, remove the tampon (and keep it to give to your doctor for laboratory examination), replace it with a pad, and contact a doctor as soon as possible. You may not have TSS but you should make sure.

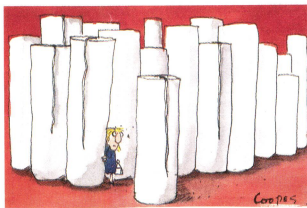
Other possible hazards

Some women may be using natural sea sponges instead of tampons. However, there have been cases of TSS (as well as allergic reactions) related to their use. They introduce even more air into the vagina than tampons, and they may well be contaminated with bacteria before you use them, as they are sold unpackaged and are reused.

The National Health and Medical Research Council warns that simply rinsing sponges won't remove infective organisms;

they require machine washing. Handle the sponge as little as possible (always with clean fingers) and don't leave it in for extended periods.

Cases of TSS have also been reported in women who left diaphragms in for extended periods (but this is also very rare). Again you're advised to handle your diaphragm hygienically and not to leave it in longer than 24 hours if used for contraception, and no longer than four hours during menstruation.



very unusual for a person to die within a few hours of inserting a tampon and having shown no symptoms beforehand, as the Queensland girl is claimed to have done.

How common is TSS?

Toxic shock is fortunately rare. In the US, it's estimated to affect between one and two per 100,000 women who use tampons per year. In about 5% of cases it's fatal, but the vast majority of people affected make a complete recovery.

The number of Australian women affected is not known, as it's not a notifiable disease (that is, there is no requirement for cases to be registered by health authorities). CHOICE says we should have a national register of such diseases, so we know precisely how common the problem is. Within weeks of the Queensland girl's death came news of the near-death of a 15-year-old South Australian girl from suspected TSS after using tam-

pons, fuelling women's fears that it may not be so unusual.

Tampon standard

We think items such as tampons, which have been linked with serious illness and death, should have been strictly regulated by the Commonwealth health department years ago. Standards for medical goods should be written directly by government with input from industry and community groups, instead of being formulated by the current industry-dominated process.

Australia developed the world's first national standard for tampons in 1986, but until now manufacturers have not been compelled to meet it.

In 1991, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (part of the health department) decided tampons should be listed as therapeutic devices, which could have made the standard enforceable. However, it took until March 1995 for the revised

standard to be published and, following media pressure, for the government to recommend that it become mandatory.

American microbiologist Dr Phillip Tierno has claimed that the new Australian Standard is deficient compared to US Food and Drug Administration regulations, but Meron Clark, manager of environment and safety at Standards Australia, disagrees.

She says the US regulation covers only the labelling and absorbency of tampons, while the Australian Standard — the only quality standard for tampons in the world — also covers requirements for materials, the strength and length of the withdrawal cord, microbial content and absorbency ratings. However, there is some controversy over the actual absorbency ranges used, compared with the US system.

At least one of Tierno's two concerns has been addressed. Following pressure from us on the Minister and the TGA,

we've been assured that the highly absorbent CMC is to be banned.

How absorbent?

Absorbency labelling has been the focus of the new joint Australian/New Zealand Standard. To minimise confusion and enable you to choose the appropriate absorbency for your needs more easily, it has supplemented the terms 'light/mini', 'regular', 'super' and 'super-plus' with the mandatory use of three absorbency ranges: 6-10 g — 'suitable for light flow'; 9-13 g — for medium flow; and 12-16 g — for heavy flow.

In the past, one manufacturer's 'regular' tampon may have been another's 'super'.

As the new Australian classification system has standardised the amount of absorbency permitted, you can now switch brands without worrying that the absorbency level may be different, which is something we have been pushing for over many years.

Warning label

We're also pleased to note that, largely as a result of our lobbying, the new standard will in the future include a requirement for stronger warnings on tampon boxes about the risks of TSS. Currently, information that tampons have been associated with TSS, which may have serious consequences, appears on the outside of packets (either on the box or wrapper) and on leaflets inside. As we go to press the current proposals require that from 1 July all manufacturers must place explicit, prominent warnings that TSS "is a rare but serious disease which can cause death" on all tampon boxes, not just on cellophane wrappers and leaflets, which are thrown away.

In addition, Australia's leading tampon suppliers — Cartigny, Johnson & Johnson, Sancella and Tambrands — recently established a Toxic Shock Syndrome Information Service (TSSIS). The original 0055 number (which would cost you 35 cents a minute to call) has been replaced with a toll-free number — 1800 634 250 — which offers 24-hour prerecorded information on the symptoms and what to tell your doctor. This phone service should be advertised on each box. More specific advice can be obtained by writing to TSSIS, PO Box 6463, North Sydney 2060.

Health statistics

Of women, weight, walking and booze ...

WOMEN ARE THE BIGGEST HEALTH consumers, but men far outnumber women as health providers, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The recent ABS publication *Women's Health* — a compendium of national data on women's health issues — says 75% of all GPs and 84% of medical specialists are male. "Women are not well represented in decision-making positions which affect the way the healthcare system operates," the report says.

Women use health services more than men, partly because of their reproductive role and partly because their greater longevity means they suffer more disabilities. (The life expectancy for women is currently almost 81 years, compared to 75 years for men.)

Women are also more likely to report recent illnesses than men. The ABS 1989-90 National Health Survey found 75% of women had reported illnesses in the two weeks prior to the survey, compared with 66% of men. Almost one in four women had consulted a doctor within that time compared with one in six men.

The report says women are less likely to be overweight or obese than men and they have healthier eating habits; they eat less fat and are less likely to add salt to their food.

According to a recent survey by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, published in *Australian Health Indicators*, two in every five adults — 4.9 million people — are overweight: 49%

of men (compared with 44% in 1989) and 32% of women (compared with 31% in 1989). People who are overweight are at a higher risk of developing various health problems, including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, cancer and diabetes.

The message is that we should be eating less (especially foods high in fat and sugar) and exercising more. That doesn't mean you need to do vigorous, intensive exercise. According to the National Heart Foundation, regular moderate exercise, especially walking, is the best way for most people to improve their health.

If you walk briskly for 30-60 minutes every day, you'll get close to the maximum protection against heart disease. We appear to be heeding this advice: while 41% of men surveyed reported walking for exercise in 1989, 49% did so in 1994 and the percentage of female walkers increased from 49% to 54% in the same period.

We also appear to be drinking less. In 1994, men drank a third less and women a quarter less than in 1989. On average, men now consume 1.3 standard drinks a day and women 0.4 of a standard drink.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that everyone should abstain from drinking alcohol on at least two days every week, and that men should drink no more than four standard drinks a day, while women should have no more than two (and none during pregnancy). □

WOMAN OUT FOR A HEALTHY WALK FLATTENED BY JOGGERS



FOUR-YEAR INDEX

July 1991 – June 1995

Pull this index out of your copy of CHOICE and keep it as a handy reference.

(T) Test (D) Includes assessment of suitability for people with disabilities

(U) Update of previous report * Additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, or letters

A

Abattoirs	Jun 92, Sep 92*
Accidents, playground	Feb 92
Air bags, passenger	Dec 93
Air quality, indoor	Jan 93, Mar 93*
Air travel, domestic	Jan 94
Air conditioners	
evaporative coolers	Oct 91(T,D)
reverse-cycle	Nov 92(T,D)
Alarms, personal emergency	Apr 94(T,D)
Allergies	Nov 92, Feb 93*
Alternative medicine	Oct 93
Aluminium in the diet	Jan 92,
	Apr 92*, Aug 92*
Animal testing on cosmetics	Mar 93
Annuities	Mar 92
Answering machines	Oct 92(T)
Antibiotics	Aug 93
Anti-discrimination legislation	Jan 92
Appliances, small 'disposable'	Oct 93
Arthritis	Oct 92, May 93*
Artificial sweeteners	May 94(T)
Asthma management	May 93
Audio equipment	
buying hi-fi components	Apr 92
car CD players	Jan 94(T)
car radio/cassette players	Jun 92(T)
cassette decks	Jul 91(T,D)
CD players, multi-disc	Mar 93(T)
personal CD players	Mar 95(T)
personal stereos	Dec 91(T,D)
portable stereos	
(with CD player)	Jan 95(T)
'Australian-made' labelling	Jan 93
Australian Standards	Dec 92, Feb 93*

B

Bank	
accounts	Sep 92, Nov 92*
service	Sep 94, Dec 94*
Banking ombudsman	Jul 91
Bar refrigerators	Sep 91(T,D)
Barbecues, kettle	Jan 93(T)
Batteries	
car	Sep 93(T)
disposal	Feb 95
Beds	
bunk	Jan 92
sofa	Jan 94

Beer, reduced-alcohol Apr 93(T), Jun 93*

Bicycles

helmets	Oct 92(T)
hybrid	Aug 93(T)
Binoculars (compact)	Mar 94(T)
Birth control, methods of	Oct 94
Blenders	
benchtop	Jan 94(T)
handheld	Nov 92(T,D)
Blood alcohol testing	Dec 91
Bottled water	Jan 92(T), Feb 92*
Brands, 'generic' and national	Aug 92
Bread	Mar 95 (T)
Breakfast cereals	Jan 94(T)

Breast

cancer	Jan 93
protheses	Nov 94
Brie cheese	Dec 93(T)
Budgeting	Aug 91
Bullbars dangers	Jun 94
Bunk beds	Jan 92
Business insolvency	Mar 92
Buying Australian	Feb 94
Buying guide, annual	
	Dec 91, Dec 92, Jan 93*, Dec 93, Dec 94

C

Cameras, compact 35 mm	Feb 93(T)
Canned food, drained weight	Aug 92(T)
Carers, services for	Apr 94, Oct 94*
Caring for older people	Jan 95, Feb 95*,
	Mar 95*

Carpets

buying	Mar 94
spot cleaners	Sep 92(T)
stain-resistance treatments	Nov 92(T)
'unstable'	Oct 94(T)

Cars

additives in oil, petrol, etc.	Jul 91
air bags, passenger	Dec 93
batteries	Sep 93(T)
bullbar dangers	Jun 94
buying a used car	Oct 93
child restraints	Apr 93, Apr 95 (T)
clamping and tow-away	Feb 93
crash tests	Aug 93, Aug 94
extended warranties for	Feb 94
Ford truck warranty	Jul 94
half-lead petrol	Oct 94, Apr 95

insurance	Feb 92, Dec 92, May 95
lead emissions	Oct 93, Apr 95
parts	Mar 94
radio/cassette players	Jun 92(T)
recalls	Dec 94
reliability	Aug 92, Mar 94, Mar 95
re-refined oils	Dec 91(T)
roadworthiness	Apr 94
rust protection, electronic	Jul 93
safety	Nov 91, Sep 92
steering locks	May 92(T,D), Jan 94(T)
Toyota Landcruiser tyres	Jan 95, Apr 95
transport in cities	Oct 91
Cassette decks, twin and single-well	
	Jul 91(T,D)

CD

adaptors, car	Mar 95(T)
players, car	Jan 94(T)
players, multi-disc	Mar 93(T)
players, personal	Mar 95 (T)

Cellular phones (analogue)

	Jul 92(T,D), Oct 92*
Cereals and grains	Jun 93
Cereals, breakfast	Jan 94(T)
Chainsaws	Jul 94(T)
Champagne & sparkling wine	
	Dec 91(T), Dec 94(T)

Charities	Jun 94, Feb 95*
Cheese, brie	Dec 93(T)
Chemicals in the home	Sep 92
Chicken, salmonella in	Oct 91(T)

Child/baby concerns

accidents, playground	Feb 92
baby play gym	Jul 91(T), Nov 91*
baby monitors	Nov 94(T,D)
bunk beds	Jan 92
car restraints	Apr 93, Apr 95(T)
high chairs	Jul 93
Kidsafe index	June 94
packaged meals	Feb 93
strollers	Nov 91(T,D), Feb 92*,
	Aug 94(T,D)
toy safety	Nov 91
Childcare	Oct 94, Nov 94
Chipper/shredders	Jan 95(T)
CHOICE in the making	Jan 92
Cholesterol and oat bran	Jun 92
Cigarettes, low-tar	Aug 93
Cladding, home	Sep 91, Mar 92*
Clothes dryers	Mar 92(T,D), Feb 94(T,D)

Clothes labelling Apr 93
Cockroaches, getting rid of Nov 93(T),
May 94*, July 94(T,U)
Coffee bags Oct 92
Complaints about lawyers Jun 92
Composting, compost bins Dec 94(T)

Computers

notebook Dec 92(T)
personal Aug 91(T), Oct 91(U)
printers Mar 93(T), May 93*
Consumer claims courts Aug 91
Contact lenses Jul 94
Contingency fees, legal Jan 95, Mar 95*
Contraception, methods of Oct 94

Cooktops

choosing Jan 92
electric Jun 95(T,D)
Coolers, small drink Dec 93(T)
Coolers, evaporative Oct 91(T,D), Mar 92*
Cordless drills Jan 92(T,D), Jun 92*, Jul 92*
Cordless iron Nov 91(T)
Cordless kettles Dec 91(T,D)
Cordless phones Dec 92(T,D)

Cosmetics

animal testing Mar 93
regulation Oct 93, Feb 94*

Court

consumer claims Aug 91
defending yourself in Jul 91, Nov 91*
Crash tests, small cars Aug 94
Credit cards Feb 93, Jan 95
Credit Reference Association Sep 94

D

Deadlocks Dec 94(T)
Debt harassment Jul 93
Dental care Dec 93
Desserts, frozen Dec 92(T)
Detergents
'green' laundry Sep 91(T)
laundry Mar 93(T)
washing-up Aug 91(T)
Digital recording Jun 93

Disabled

aids for Nov 94
rights of June 95
Dishwashers Jul 91(U), Feb 93(T,D),
Nov 93(T,D,U), Apr 95(T,D)
Domestic air travel Jan 94
Drugs, cheaper prescriptions Jan 95, Mar 95*

Drills

cordless Jan 92(T,D), Jun 92*, Jul 92*
impact Aug 93(T,D), Dec 93*
Drinks coolers, small Dec 93(T)
Dryers, clothes Mar 92(T,D)

E

Economic jargon explained Oct 92
Elected representatives, using Oct 91
Electric cooktops Jun 95(T,D)
Electric frypans Aug 92(T)
Electric heat guns Feb 92(T,D)
Electric lawnmowers
Nov 91(T,D), Feb 92(T,D,U)

Electric lawn trimmers Oct 94(T)
Electric wall ovens Jun 93(T,D),
Aug 93*, Oct 93(T,D,U), Nov 93*
Emergencies, home Mar 92
EnergyCard Jan 95, Mar 95*

Energy

efficient renovation Oct 93
renewable Sep 93
saving May 92

Environment

labelling Dec 91, Jan 92
quiz May 93, Dec 93*, Apr 95
Ethical investment Sep 91, Apr 94
Evaporative air coolers Oct 91(T,D)
Extended warranties for cars Feb 94
Exterior paint Jun 93(T),
Aug 94(T), Oct 94*, May 95(T)
Eyes, looking after Mar 94

F

Fabrics, sun protection Jan 95(T), Mar 95*
Fan heaters Jun 94(T,D)
Fans,
Mistral Apr 92, Jul 92*
pedestal Oct 94(T)
Fast food Apr 94(T)
Fax machines Jan 92(T)
Film, colour print Jun 95(T)
Filters, water Feb 93(T), Sep 93(T,U)
Financial planners Apr 95
Flame-retardant spray Sep 93(T)
Fleas, controlling pets' Feb 94
Fly Buys Nov 94

Food

aluminium in the diet Jan 92,
Apr 92*, Aug 92*
bread Mar 95(T)
breakfast cereals Jan 94(T)
canned, drained weight Aug 92(T)
cheese, brie Dec 93(T)
chicken, salmonella Oct 91(T)
cholesterol and oat bran Jun 92
coffee bags Oct 92
'fast' Apr 94(T)
fresh pasta & sauces Jul 93(T)
frozen Dec 92(T), Feb 92(T), Sep 94(T)
fruit substitutes for kids Mar 93(T)
grains and cereals June 93
healthy eating May 94
irradiation of Aug 92
labelling Mar 92
meat production Jun 92, Sep 92*
new processes Jul 91
nutrient claims on labels Feb 95
nutrition information trends Aug 94
organic food labelling Aug 91
packaged meals for kids Feb 93(T)
pâté Jun 94(T)
peanut butter Jul 94(T)
processed meat May 95
salmonella in chicken Oct 91(T)
sandwiches, pre-packaged Feb 95(T)
soy drinks Apr 92(T)
sports drinks Mar 95(T)
storage Sep 92, Mar 95

sugar in the diet Apr 92
trends Dec 94
vitamins & minerals Sep 93
yoghurt Nov 92(T)
Food processors Nov 94(T,D)
Ford truck warranty Jul 94
Fridges — see refrigerators
Fruit substitutes for kids Mar 93
Frypans, electric Aug 92(T)
Funerals, organising Sep 92

G

Garden hoses Nov 93(T,D)
Gas heaters
flued Apr 93(T,D)
unflued Apr 92(T,D)
Mod-n-Aire Jul 92, Sep 92*
G-Code programmer Jun 94(T), Feb 95*
'Generic' and national brands Aug 92
Glues Jul 93
Goods and services tax Jul 92, Oct 92*
Grains and cereals Jun 93
'Green'
homes Apr 95
labelling Dec 91, Jan 92
laundry detergents Sep 91(T)
organisations Oct 94
shopping centres Oct 91
supermarkets Oct 91
wood Feb 95
Greenhouse effect Oct 92

H

Hair and hair products Jan 93
Half lead petrol Oct 94
Handheld blenders Nov 92(T,D)
Harassment by telephone Oct 93
Health insurance Nov 92, May 94
Healthy eating May 94
Hearing aids Apr 94
Hearing damage Apr 95
Heat guns, electric Feb 92(T,D)
Heaters
convection Jun 95(T)
fan Jun 94(T,D)
gas Apr 92(T,D), Apr 93(T,D)
water Aug 93(T), Nov 93*
Heating, home May 93
Helmets, bicycle Oct 92(T)
Hifi systems Apr 92
Hifi VCRs Oct 91(T)
High chairs Jul 93(T,D)
Holidays Aug 91, Dec 91
ski Jun 95

Home

chemicals in Sep 92
cladding Sep 91, Mar 92*
DIY and the law May 92
emergencies Mar 92
'green' Apr 95
heating May 93
insulation Apr 93
insurance Oct 93
pollution Jan 93, Mar 93*
selling Jun 94

Hormone replacement therapy May 92
Hoses, garden Nov 93(T)
Hot water trial Sep 94

I

Impact drills Aug 93(T,D) Dec 93*
Income protection insurance Jul 94, Oct 94*

Index

three-year Jun 92
four-year Jun 93
four-year Jun 94
four-year Jun 95
Indoor air quality Jan 93, Mar 93*
In-line skates Dec 92(T)
Insect repellents Jan 95(T), Feb 95(U)
Insolvency, business Mar 92
Insulation, home Apr 93

Insurance

agents and brokers Feb 92
car Feb 92, Dec 92, May 95
claims Aug 93
commissions Aug 94
complaint schemes Oct 93
duty of disclosure Jan 94
health Nov 92, May 94
house and contents Oct 93
income protection Jul 94, Oct 94*
information brochures Aug 94
letter-writing guide Aug 94
life Sep 93, Dec 93*, Jan 94*, Feb 94*
travel Nov 91
unnecessary/'junk' Jan 94

Investment

advice Apr 95
annuities Mar 92
ethical Sep 91, Apr 94
options Mar 94
property Jul 93

Irons

cordless Nov 91(T)
steam Mar 92(T,D), May 94(T,D)
Irradiation of food Aug 92

J

Jargon, economic Oct 92
'Junk' insurance Jan 94

K

Kangaroo meat Jun 95
Kettle barbecues Jan 93(T)
Kettles, cordless Dec 91(T,D)
Kitchen, buying a Sep 94

L

Labelling

'Australian-made' Jan 93
clothes Apr 93
food Mar 92
'green' Dec 91, Jan 92
nutrient claims Feb 95
organic food Aug 91

Lamps, solar Oct 94(T)
Laundry detergents Mar 93(T)
'green' Sep 91(T)
Lawn trimmers, electric Oct 94(T)

Lawnmowers

electric Nov 91(T,D), Feb 92(T,D,U)
petrol Nov 93(T), Jan 94*
push Nov 91(T)
Lawyers, complaints about Jun 92

Lead

health effects May 95
emissions from cars Oct 93
half lead petrol Oct 94
Legal advice, by phone Nov 92, Jan 93*

Life insurance

term Sep 93, Dec 93, Jan 94*, Feb 94*
commissions Aug 94
Light bulbs, long-life Jun 93(T)
Locks, exterior door Dec 94(T)
Lost wallet, what to do Aug 92
Low-tar cigarettes Aug 93

M

Market competition Mar 94
Mattresses Aug 93, Oct 93*

Meat

Kangaroo Jun 95
processed May 95
production Jun 92, Sep 92*
Medical rights Dec 93
Medicine, alternative Oct 93
Microbes, the body's May 94

Microwave ovens

medium Jul 91(T,D), Nov 91*, Apr 94(T,D)
small Jun 92(T,D), Aug 92*
queries answered Apr 94
Minerals and vitamins Sep 93
Mistral fans Apr 92, Jul 92*
Mobile phones (analogue) Jul 92(T,D), Aug 94(T), Nov 94*

Mod-n-Aire gas heater Jul 92, Sep 92*
Moisturisers Dec 91
Monitors, baby Nov 94(T,D)

Mortgage

managers Mar 95
switching Nov 93
Mosquito repellents Jan 95(T), Feb 95(U)
Motor oils, re-refined Dec 91(T)
MPs, using your Oct 91

N

Nader, Ralph, speech Mar 95
Nappies Nov 93, Apr 94*
Network selling Jul 92
Nutrient claims on food labels Feb 95
Nutrition information trends Aug 94

O

Oat bran and cholesterol Jun 92
Oils, re-refined motor Dec 91(T)
Older people, caring for Jan 95, Feb 95*, Mar 95*

Ombudsman, banking Jul 91
Orbital sanders Jun 92(T)
Organic food labelling Aug 91
Oven cleaners Sep 94(T), Nov 94*

Ovens

electric multi-function wall Jun 93(T,D),
Aug 93*, Oct 93(U,T,D), Nov 93*
Overlockers May 95(T)
Ozone layer Aug 92

P

Packaged meals for kids Feb 93
Packaging Jun 92
Paint, exterior Feb 92(T), Jun 93(T),
Aug 94(T), Oct 94*, May 95(T)
Pantyhose, run-free May 92
Pasta & sauces, fresh Jul 93(T)
Pâté Jun 94(T)
Patients' rights Dec 93
Pay TV Oct 92, Feb 93*, May 95
Peanut butter Jul 94(T)
Pedestal fans Oct 94(T)
Perfume May 93
Pest inspections May 92, Jul 92*
Petrol, half-lead Oct 94
Petrol lawnmowers Nov 93(T), Jan 94*
Phone advice, legal Nov 92
Phones — see Telephones
Plastic food storage bags Sep 92
Plastics recycling Jun 94
Playground accidents Feb 92
Pollution, home Jan 93
Pool fences Dec 92, May 93*
Premenstrual syndrome Oct 91
Pre-packaged sandwiches Feb 95(T)
Prescription drugs, cheaper Jan 95, Mar 95*

Printers, computer Mar 93(T), May 93*
Privacy Feb 94, Jun 94
Product recalls and bans May 93
Property investment Jul 93
Public transport Sep 94

R

Recycling Apr 93, Jun 94

Refrigerators

bar Sep 91(T,D)
2-door, 200-299 L Mar 92(T)
2-door, 300-349 L Sep 92(T,D)
2-door, 350-400 L May 93(T), Jul 93*
2-door, 395-450 L Feb 94(T,D)
2-door frost-free 350-400 L May 93(T)

Refunds Feb 95
Reliability, cars Aug 92, Mar 94, Mar 95
Renovating, energy-efficient Oct 93
Repellents, mosquito Jan 95(T), Feb 95(U)
Re-refined oils Dec 91(T)
Retirement villages May 92
Reverse-cycle air conditioners Nov 92(T,D)

Room coolers, evaporative Oct 91(T,D)
Royal jelly May 94
Rural land, buying Sep 91
Rust protection, electronic Jul 93

S

Safety switches	Jul 92, Apr 94
Salmonella in chicken	Oct 91(T)
Sanders, orbital	Jun 92(T)
Sandwiches, pre-packaged	Feb 95(T)
Savings plans	Mar 93
School sponsorship	Apr 94, Aug 94*
Secateurs	Oct 92(T), Feb 93*
Security screen doors	Sep 93, Jan 94*
Selling techniques	Oct 91
Sewing machines	
basic	Apr 93(T,D)
computerised	Sep 91(T,U)
overlockers	May 95(T)
Shade materials	Jan 93
Skates, in-line	Dec 92(T)
Ski holidays	Jun 95
Sleeping tablets	Apr 92
Slimming programs	Jun 93
Small claims courts	Aug 91
Smoke detectors	Feb 92(T)
Sofa beds	Jan 94
Solar lamps	Oct 94(T)
Soy drinks	Apr 92(T)
Sparkling wine and champagne	Dec 91(T), Dec 94(T)

Sports drinks	Mar 95(T)
Stalking	Mar 94, May 94*
Standards Australia	Dec 92, Feb 93*
Steam irons	Mar 92(T,D), May 94(T,D)
Steering locks, car	May 92(T,D), Jan 94(T)
Stereos, portable (with CD player)	Jan 95(T)
Stolen property, reclaiming	Sep 92
Strata management	Dec 94
Strollers	Nov 91(T,D), Feb 92*

layback, umbrella	Aug 94(T,D)
Sugar in the diet	Apr 92
Sun protection	Jan 93, Jan 95(T), Mar 95*
Superannuation guarantee	Feb 93
Supermarket	
survey	Jul 91, Sep 91*, Jul 92, Jul 93, Jul 94
trading terms	Jun 93
'green'	Oct 91
Sweeteners, artificial	May 94(T)

T

Tampons	Apr 92(T), Jun 95
---------	-------------------

Tax	
goods and services	Jul 92, Oct 92*
rights and obligations	Mar 93
Telecommunications	Feb 93

Telephones	
answering machines	Oct 92(T)
cellular/mobile (analogue)	
Jul 92(T,D), Aug 94(T), Nov 94*	
cordless	Dec 92(T,D)
handsets	Nov 93(T)
harassment	Oct 93
privacy	Jun 94

Television	
large	Jun 94(T)
medium-sized	
Jul 92(T,D), Jan 93*, Apr 95(T)	
pay	Oct 92, Feb 93*
pocket-sized	May 93(T)

portable	Apr 93(T,D)
Termite inspections	May 92(T)
Timber, how to buy 'green'	Feb 95
Timer switches, electric	Feb 95(T)
Toasters	Mar 94(T,D)
Toothpaste	Sep 91
Toy safety	Nov 91
Tradespeople, hiring	Jul 93, Nov 93*
Tranquillisers	Apr 92
Transport	Oct 91, Mar 92*, Sep 94

Travel	
domestic air	Jan 94
insurance	Nov 91
money	May 92
Tyres, Landcruiser	Jan 95, Apr 95

U

Unit pricing	Sep 92
--------------	--------

V

Vacuum cleaners	
expensive	Oct 93(T,D)
mid price range	Aug 91(T,D), Sep 91*
low-priced	Jul 94(T,D)
shampoo	May 93(T,D)
Vets' fees	Nov 92, Jan 93*, Feb 93*

Video equipment	
G-Code programmer	June 94(T), Feb 95*
game systems	Dec 93(T)
recorders	Oct 91(T)
Mar 93(T), May 94(T), Feb 95(T)	
tapes	Oct 91(U)
Vitamins and minerals	Sep 93

W

Wall ovens, electric	Jun 93(T,D), Oct 93(U,T), Nov 93*
Warranties, extended, for cars	Feb 94
Washing machines	Nov 91(T,D), Feb 92*, Jan 93(T,D), Mar 93*, Sep 93(T,D), Sep 94(T,D), Nov 94(T,U), Feb 95*
Washing-up detergents	Aug 91(T)

Water	
bottled	Jan 92(T), Feb 92*
filters	Feb 93(T), Sep 93(T,U)
heaters	Aug 93(T)
quality	Aug 91(T), Feb 92*
Weight-loss programs	Jun 93
Wine, two-litre casks	Dec 93(T)
Wood, how to buy 'green'	Feb 95
Worm farms	Aug 93, Dec 94

Y

Yoghurt and 'probiotics'	Nov 92(T)
--------------------------	-----------

CONSUMER-IN-LAW

Anti-discrimination legislation	Jan 92
Business insolvency	Mar 92
Cars, clamping and tow-away	Feb 93
Clothes labelling	Apr 93
Commonwealth Government appeals	

Jan 95	
Consumer claims courts	Aug 91
Contingency fees	Jan 95, Mar 95*

Consumer

consumer claims/small claims	Aug 91
defending yourself in	Jul 91, Nov 91*
Credit Reference Association	Sep 94
Debt harassment	Jul 93
Defending yourself in court	Jul 91, Nov 91*
Do-it-yourself and the law	May 92
Duty of disclosure, insurance	Jan 94
Elected representatives, using	Oct 91
Fans, Mistral	Apr 92, Jul 92*
Ford truck warranty	July 94
Insolvency, business	Mar 92
Insurance claims	Aug 93
Lawyers, complaints about	Jun 92
Legal advice by phone	Nov 92, Jan 93*
Lost wallet, what to do	Aug 92
Medical rights	Dec 93
Mistral fans	Apr 92, Jul 92*
MPs, using your	Oct 91
Patients' rights	Dec 93
Product liability	Sep 91
Product recalls and bans	May 93
Reclaiming stolen property	Sep 92
Refunds	Feb 95
Small claims courts	Aug 91
Stalking	Mar 94, May 94*
Statutory derivative action	Aug 94
Tax rights and obligations	Mar 93

Telephone

harassment by	Oct 93
privacy	Jun 94

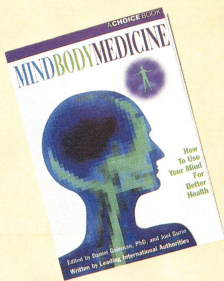
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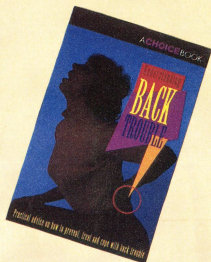
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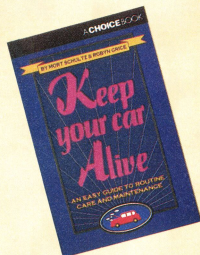
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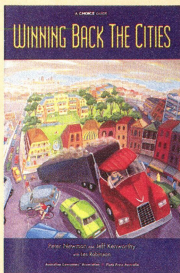


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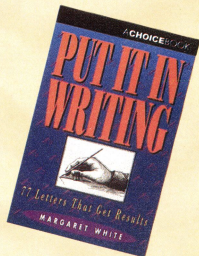
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Code: CC



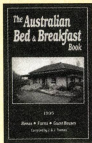
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Anna Ciddor has written a book that is full of her first-hand experience of travelling with children. Among other details it includes: where and when you should go, how to pack, how to cope with the trip and how to find the right accommodation.

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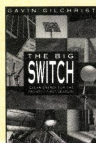
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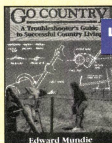


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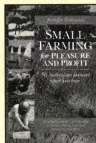
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Code: GC



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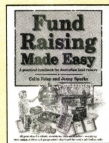


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Code: FRME



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An up-to-date guide to identifying what you need in computers, software and peripherals for your home or office, leading you gently through all the bewildering jargon and competing offers.

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Code: HBPC

Colour print film

Will the film you select for your camera affect the quality of the final print? We report on tests of the most popular colour print films available. The results show it's important to pick the right film for your needs.

TAKING PICTURES IS A WAY OF recording the memorable moments in our lives, so it's important to get good results.

This report won't turn you into a professional photographer, but it will tell you which brands of film are best, and how to pick the right type of film for your particular needs. We also tell you how to store your prints so they last longer.

THE TEST

This test was conducted by the Consumer Research Laboratory in Britain as part of an international film test. It included the most popular 35 mm colour print films for amateur use on the Australian market. Specialist films and films with a speed of over 400 ISO were excluded.

Using identical high-quality SLR cameras, a number of scenes were photographed:

- Four outdoor scenes in bright sunlight — a portrait, a beach scene, a landscape with green trees and grass and two people shaded by a sun umbrella.
- A person standing indoors in low-level daylight.

■ A person sitting indoors with flash lighting.

■ A BBC test card showing flesh tones.

All films were processed at the same time by the same laboratory. The resulting colour prints were assessed by viewing panels, and judged on the basis of latitude, graininess, sharpness and colour rendition (see right for details).

WHAT TO BUY

The following films were the best performers in each group tested. Most of the films performed adequately, so if price is your major concern, use the table on page 32 to identify the cheaper brands in each group.

■ Slow film (ISO 50):

equal	KONICA Impresa	\$7.00
	AGFACOLOR Ultra	\$8.75

■ Standard film (ISO 100):

	KODAK Gold III	\$6.00
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■ Medium film (ISO 200):

	KODAK Gold III	\$7.50
--	----------------	--------

■ Fast film (ISO 400):

equal	KODAK Gold III	\$8.50
	AGFACOLOR XRG	\$7.25



The film guide

Deciding what film to use can be difficult. Here's a run down of the most popular types of film available.

Use slow film (ISO 50) for:

- Taking photographs you'll want to enlarge, because the process of enlargement magnifies the grain and a fast film with coarser grain would give you a very crude result.
- Situations where you want greater detail and sharpness, and more accurate colour rendition.
- Situations where there is plenty of light.

Use standard (ISO 100) and medium film (ISO 200) for:

- Cheaper cameras. These films are usually better able to cope with incorrect camera settings and cameras with limited adjustments. You can easily take one shot in bright sunlight and the next in shade with these films.
- General-purpose photography, especially if you're an inexperienced photographer.

Use fast film (ISO 400) for:

- Situations where you need to compensate for the lack of light and won't be using a flash or when you need increased range for your flash.
- When you want to use small lens apertures to get both close and distant subjects in focus.
- Fast shutter speed action pictures.
- When you need to use a telephoto lens on an SLR camera without a tripod.
- A very cheap camera with a small lens and limited exposure adjustments (disposable cameras usually come with ISO 400 film).

Use ultra-fast films (ISO 1000 and over) for:

- Dark, indoor conditions where you won't be using your flash or don't have a tripod to keep the camera steady.



Colour

There wasn't that much difference between the films when bright colours were photographed. Differences were more noticeable with subtle colours such as greens and some skin tones. The picture on the left gives a more accurate representation of the colours in this scene than the one on the right.



Graininess

If the particles of dye that make up the picture are very noticeable, the picture is said to be grainy. For really big enlargements, or selective ones — where part of the picture is blown up — slower films tend to produce better results.



Speed

In general, slower films give better colours and sharper pictures than faster films. The picture on the left was taken with a slow speed film, while the picture on the right was taken with a much faster film.



Latitude

The term latitude refers to how much you can under or over-expose a film and still obtain an acceptable result. In our test, the films were under-exposed by two stops, giving only a quarter of the amount of light that would be correct for the speed of the film. The film on the left has enough latitude to cope with the exposure error while the film on the right doesn't.

Processing perfection

Processing also plays an important part in getting the best possible quality prints.

Colour can be affected dramatically by processing. If your photos come back from the processor with unsatisfactory colour, especially skin tones, ask for them to be reprinted without charge.

Printing exposure is as critical to the end result as the exposure when the photo is taken. If you shoot a scene with both very bright and very dark areas, an automatic processing machine will try to give the print average exposure. This can result in poor contrast and loss of detail.

If, through no fault of your own, you receive poor quality prints from your processor, don't hesitate to ask for free reprints.



Looking after your prints

Photographic prints and negatives deteriorate if they're stored in unsuitable conditions, so here are a few tips to maximise their life.

- Keep your prints away from bright light (both sunlight and fluorescent light) as exposure to ultraviolet light can destroy them. A layer of glass can provide some protection if the prints need to be exposed to light.
- Store your prints in an album, but make sure you keep it in a dry place with good air flow to avoid humidity which could promote the growth of mould.
- Alternatively, put your prints in plastic bags in sealed containers, with a sachet of moisture-absorbing silica gel. Watch out for silverfish, which have been known to destroy prints and negatives.

What to look for

- **Which speed?** A film's speed is shown on the box as an ISO number, and is often included in its name (this is equivalent to the old ASA rating). The more sensitive a film is to light, the faster the exposure process, and the higher its ISO number. A film with an ISO number of 50 is considered 'slow', while an ISO 400 film is 'fast'.
- **For casual photography:** Most people use ISO 100 films. These films are designed for jobs like taking holiday snaps, and are best for outdoor situations on sunny days.
- **For the best results:** In general, use the slowest possible film suitable for the occasion. (For more information see *The film guide left*.)
- **Check the date.** Always make sure when buying film that it hasn't reached its use-by date. Colour film should be processed before the date shown.
- **For long-term storage.** Unexposed film should be kept in a refrigerator at a temperature of 13°C or lower. If you keep a film in cold storage, it's very important to allow it to reach room temperature before unsealing the container otherwise moisture may condense on the film surface.

Colour print film

			1	2	3	4	5	
Brand/model (in rank order within groups)		Origin	Target price (\$)*	Colour	Latitude	Sharpness	Graininess	Overall score (%)
SLOW - ISO 50								
equal	KONICA Impresa	Japan	7.00	3	2	5	4	65
	AGFACOLOR Ultra	Germany	8.75	2	4	4	4	65
STANDARD - ISO 100								
	KODAK Gold III	(C)	6.00	3	5	4	4	80
	FUJICOLOR Reala	Japan	8.25	4	4	4	4	75
	FUJICOLOR Super HG II	Japan	5.50	3	4	4	4	75
equal	SOULCOLOR	Japan	3.95	3	4	4	4	75
	FOCAL DX	Japan	2.95	3	4	4	4	75
	TARGET	Japan	3.00	3	4	4	4	75
	AMCAl Amcolor	Japan	3.95	3	4	4	4	75
	AGFACOLOR XRG	Germany	5.75	3	4	4	4	70
	KONICA Super XG	Japan	4.50	3	3	4	4	70
equal	POLAROID High Definition (A)	Japan	3.20	3	3	4	4	70
	CHEM MART Super XG (B)	Japan	3.95	3	3	4	4	70
	ACME Super XG	Japan	3.00	3	3	4	4	70
	NO FRILLS Super XG	Japan	2.95	3	3	4	4	70
MEDIUM - ISO 200								
	KODAK Gold III	(C)	7.50	4	5	4	3	80
equal	KONICA Super XG	Japan	5.75	3	5	4	3	75
	POLAROID High Definition (A)	Japan	3.30	3	5	4	3	75
	AGFACOLOR XRG	Germany	6.25	3	5	4	3	70
equal	FUJICOLOR Super HG II	Japan	6.50	3	4	4	4	70
	FOCAL DX	Japan	2.95	3	4	4	4	70
FAST - ISO 400								
equal	KODAK Gold III	(C)	8.50	3	5	4	3	70
	AGFACOLOR XRG	Germany	7.25	3	5	3	2	70
	FUJICOLOR Super HG V	Japan	7.75	3	3	4	3	60
	FOCAL DX	Japan	3.95	3	3	4	3	60
equal	KONICA Super XG	Japan	7.00	3	3	4	3	60
	POLAROID (A)	Japan	N/A	3	3	4	3	60
	AGFACOLOR Optima	Germany	10.00	3	3	3	2	55

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in March 1995 except for the Polaroid ISO 100 and 200 films which were checked in Sydney only. Prices given are for 24-exposure films.

(A) We had problems finding this film — it does not seem to be widely available.

(B) This film is distributed only in NSW.

(C) This film is manufactured in a number of countries including: USA, UK, France, Australia, Canada, Brazil.

N/A Not available.

PERFORMANCE

Panellists ranked the films on colour, latitude, sharpness and graininess. Films were scored out of five for each of these attributes by each person. Scores given in the table have been rounded, to the nearest integer for individual attributes and to the nearest 5% for the overall score.

1 Colour

Panels of viewers ranked prints from a number of test scenes according to their preference for colours. The viewers also examined the flesh tone rendition in some of the prints.

2 Latitude

Each film was deliberately under and over-exposed. Our experts assessed by how many stops each film could be under or over-exposed and still produce acceptable prints.

3 Sharpness

A panel of viewers ranked enlargements of a beach scene on the basis of sharpness, while expert photographers rated a number of other scenes.

4 Graininess

A panel of viewers ranked prints from

one of the portrait shots on the basis of graininess, while another panel did the same to enlargements from the beach scene. Our experts also rated prints from several different scenes for graininess.

5 Overall score

The overall score was calculated from individual scores, rounded and expressed as a percentage. Attributes were weighted as follows:

- Colour: 45%.
- Latitude: 25%.
- Sharpness: 15%.
- Graininess: 15%.

Any old irons?

Do you have a CHOICE-recommended appliance more than 15 years old that is still going strong?

As part of CHOICE's 35th birthday celebrations, we are holding a competition to find the subscriber with the oldest working CHOICE-recommended appliance. To enter, your appliance must be:

- Still in working order.
- A model recommended by CHOICE.
- At least 15 years old.

Simply send in a photo of yourself and the appliance, if possible telling us which issue it was recommended in. (If you can't remember or haven't kept back issues, give our Consumer Information Service a call on (02) 559 9855 and they'll help you find it.)

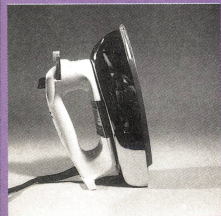
The subscriber with the oldest appliance will win a CHOICE pack valued at over \$150, including:

- A one-year subscription to CHOICE.
- A one-year subscription to Consuming Interest.
- A one-year subscription to CHOICE Travel.
- Three recent CHOICE Books.

All entries will also go into a draw to win a CHOICE tested and recommended appliance from one of our recent tests.

In October CHOICE we'll publish the name and photo of the subscriber with the oldest appliance, and the winner of the draw.

Send your entries to Oldest appliance, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204, to reach us by July 31, 1995.



SUBSCRIBER 16th DRAW



Subscriber draw winner Peter Fraser

Twenty years of subscribing to CHOICE have paid off in more ways than one for our fourteenth subscriber draw winner, Peter Fraser from Sydney.

Peter came across CHOICE through a friend at the start of his marriage. While he was setting up a home, CHOICE seemed the logical magazine to subscribe to. Over the years it has proved its worth as Peter has used the magazine to choose new appliances.

Now he reads the magazine for interest, information and the odd test report when he needs to buy a new appliance.

"I like to know what's going on and CHOICE is great for general knowledge," he said.

In winning the Mitsubishi video recorder and large-screen television, Peter had two less test reports to read and could do away with a collection of old colour TV sets he had accumulated over the years. "We were going to buy a new television so the prize really came at the right time," he said.

The entire family was anxious to use the prize, but there was no holding back his teenage son, who assembled the equipment, tuned in the channels and set the products to immediate use when they arrived on the doorstep.

Congratulations to Peter Fraser and his family on their prize, and we wish them happy CHOICE reading for the next 20 years.

Use the order form overleaf

CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

1. The winner will be drawn from new subscriptions and renewals from personal subscribers (including members and donors of gift subscriptions) received April 1 to June 30, 1995. If you opt for a two-year subscription, you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you actually renew or subscribe.
2. Information on how to enter and prizes forms part of these conditions of entry.
3. Employees, and their immediate families, of the Australian Consumers' Association and its associated companies and agencies are ineligible to enter.
4. Entrants must be residents of Australia.
5. Applications are subject to a verification check and the judge's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into.
6. The prizes will be delivered free anywhere within Australia.
7. Prizes cannot be taken as cash.
8. South Australian residents may enter the draw by completing the form and posting to: Reply Paid No. 24, ACA, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204, without subscribing to the magazine. Only one entry per person is permissible through this method.
9. Last date for receipt of entries to the draw is June 30, 1995. No responsibility accepted for lost, late or misdirected mail.
10. The draw will be conducted at the office of the Consumers' Association at 10 am on July 3, 1995.
11. The winner will be notified by letter and published in the earliest feasible issue of CHOICE after that.
12. The promoter is Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204. NSW permit No. TC36/741 issued on 27/2/95, ACT Permit No. TP95/0303 issued under the Lotteries Ordinance on 27/2/95, NT No. NT95/0299 issued on 27/2/95.

Order Form

Send to:
Australian Consumers' Association
 57 Carrington Road
 Marrickville NSW 2204

Phone subscriptions: (02) 558 8088
 General: (02) 558 0099
 Fax: (02) 559 3260

Subscriptions	Cost	\$	Qty Self	Qty Gift	Amount
▶ Choice	1 year	48	Personal		
	2 years	89			
	1 year	66	Institution		
	2 years	124			
▶ Consuming Interest	1 year	27	Personal		
	2 years	50			
	1 year	35	Institution		
	2 years	67			
▶ Travel	1 year	27	Personal		
	2 years	50			
	1 year	35	Institution		
	2 years	67			

Filing systems	Cost		Qty Self	Qty Gift	Amount
▶ Box holders	\$12 each	Red			
		Green			
		Blue			
▶ Folders	\$12 each	Red			
		Black			
		Grey			

Total

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Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

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Gift recipient details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

Address

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Gift card to read:

To From

Send gift renewal notice to me ☐ Yes ☐ No

To speed your order, attach your
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If you're already an automatic subscriber, please remember to let us know if your card number or bank account details change. We get over 50 credit card rejection each month, which causes unnecessary hassle for both you and us. Just give our subscriptions department a call with the details. Give them a call too if you'd like to change over to automatic subscription. All subscribers changing to automatic renewal receive a \$10 book token to be spent on CHOICE books.

■ The number to call: (02) 558 8088.



Do you need a good holiday?

CHOICE Travel takes you behind the brochures and gives honest, down-to-earth advice on where to go, what's to do there, and how to get the most out of your travel dollar.

Travel is produced by the UK Consumers' Association and reprinted by CHOICE four times a year. While its reports are from the perspective of a European base, much of the information in them is just as useful to an Australian travelling in Europe and the USA, with occasional forays further afield. There's quality information about different regions, accommodation, specialities of local cuisine, sights to see, as well as places to avoid and tips on dealing with holiday hassles.

A subscription to Travel costs just \$27 a year — you can use the form on this page to subscribe. The latest issue features:

- Andalusia
- Alsace
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Questioning Big Brother

It's easy to feel powerless when dealing with a big government department, especially if it makes a decision you think is wrong. The good news is that it's your legal right to ask for a review of decisions made against you. In this article we tell you how.

BEFORE 1975, IF YOU HAD A PROBLEM with a Commonwealth Government department, you could either go to court, which was slow and expensive, or you could complain to your local member of parliament.

In the 1970s a system was introduced which allows people to challenge decisions made by government departments. How can you use that system if you think you've been wronged by the Commonwealth?

Is my complaint legitimate?

If you've ever received a tax notification which didn't seem right, or had an application for some type of income support rejected, you may have wondered if the department had made a mistake. It's only human nature to think a decision is wrong if it isn't in your favour, but on the other hand, government departments have been known to make incorrect decisions. There are two main reasons for this:

- The client couldn't properly explain their circumstances, leading to a decision made on incomplete or incorrect information.
- The department's interpretation of the law is open to question.



So how do you know when you should appeal a decision?

Annette O'Neil, a senior member with the Sydney office of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal, says the best thing to do if you disagree with a decision is to appeal. "People have a legal right to appeal, and they should know that they will not be shot" if they question a decision, O'Neil says.

Michael Raper, director of the Sydney Welfare Rights Centre, echoes these sentiments: "The appeal system is a rights-based system, so people should not ever be put off. If you disagree with a decision, you should pursue it as far as you can."

How do you appeal?

We can't describe in detail the appeal process within every government department. Instead we'll provide a gen-

eral guide on how to question a departmental decision.

If a decision is made and you think it's wrong, try to find out why it was made in the first place. It may be that the department involved didn't properly explain its reasons. If possible, talk to the person who actually made the decision.

Once you properly understand why a decision was made, you may find you no longer disagree with the outcome — even if you don't like it.

If you still think a mistake has been made, the next step is to make an appeal within the department involved. Most departments have an established procedure for the internal review of decisions (see page 37 for examples). In most cases the review will be conducted by a senior staff member who was not directly involved in the case.

If you disagree with the outcome of

the review, you can appeal to an independent tribunal. In some cases this will be the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), in others you will first need to appeal to a specialist tribunal. For example:

- The Social Security Appeals Tribunal, which reviews decisions made by the Department of Social Security.

- Refugee Review Tribunal, which reviews decisions made by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs regarding the refugee status of applicants who are already in Australia.

- Immigration Review Tribunal, which reviews visa-related decisions made by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

- Veterans' Review Board, which reviews decisions made by the Department of Veterans' Affairs about disability pensions.

Administrative Appeals Tribunal

The AAT has the power to review decisions made by Commonwealth ministers, government departments and agencies, employees of those departments and other tribunals such as those mentioned above. It also has powers to review specific decisions made under particular acts of parliament, including social security pensions and benefits, veterans' pen-

sions, Commonwealth workers' compensation, taxation, deportation of criminals and student assistance.

Three main methods are used by the AAT to review decisions: conferences, mediation and hearings.

Conferences allow department representatives to discuss issues relating to the case with the person making the appeal. It's possible the dispute may be settled at this stage or taken to mediation and/or hearing. Mediation is carried out in an attempt to negotiate a settlement with the help of a neutral third party, the mediator. The mediator doesn't decide the dispute, but helps the parties to reach an agreement.

If conference and mediation fail to resolve the problem, a hearing may take place. This is a formal tribunal procedure used to resolve a dispute. It's usually in a hearing room, which looks similar to a court room. A hearing can be conducted before a single tribunal member or a three-member panel.

In most cases you don't need a lawyer when you appeal to the AAT, though it may help to bring along an adviser. There's a lodgment fee of \$300, but this is waived if the appeal relates to the maintenance of income support and it's refunded if the review is successful.

If you're still unhappy with the deci-

sion, and question its legality, the next stage is to take it to the Federal Court. Alternatively, if you have a complaint about how the matter was handled, you can go to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

See you in court

The Federal Court has the power to review the legality of decisions made by government departments. Some grounds for appealing to the Federal Court include:

- The rules of natural justice weren't followed.

- Required procedures weren't followed.

As you would expect, the process is formal so you'll need a lawyer. There is also a \$300 filing fee plus a \$500 hearing fee. If you lose the case, you'll usually have to pay the other party's costs.

Office of last resort

At any stage of the appeal process, it's possible to apply to the Commonwealth Ombudsman to examine a particular case.

The Ombudsman's role is much wider than simply reviewing decisions. It is to ensure Commonwealth departments and authorities act fairly and reasonably, and to improve the overall quality of public administration.

The office has wide powers to investigate complaints about most Commonwealth agencies, and can force government employees to hand over documents and answer questions under oath.

The Ombudsman prefers people to try to sort out problems directly with departments or agencies. However, once you've decided to complain, there are no fees to pay or formal procedures to follow. Applications can be made in writing, in person, or by phone. The Ombudsman doesn't normally look at decisions which are more than a year old.

If your complaint is found to be justified, the Ombudsman tells the agency what conclusions have been reached, and may recommend one of the following remedies:

- That the department reconsiders or changes its decision;

- Changes its rules or procedures; or

- That it pays you compensation for losses you've suffered as a result of its decision or action.

HOW TO BE APPEALING

Appealing a decision made by a Commonwealth Government department or agency can be traumatic, so here are a few pointers to make it easier.

- Lodge the appeal as soon as possible — some departments have time limits on how long you have to make an appeal after the initial decision.

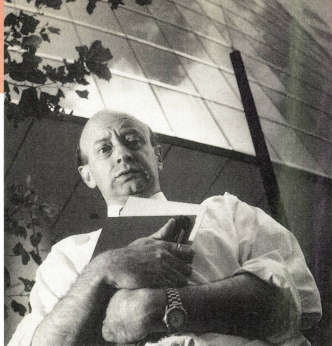
- If possible, put your appeal in writing, though it's sometimes useful to call the department first to find out who you should address your letter to and what details or supporting evidence to include.

- Think carefully about why you're appealing a decision and express this as simply and clearly as possible.

- Ask for an interpreter if you have difficulty communicating in English. Most agencies will supply one free.

- Don't be afraid to ask to see files relating to your case. This is your right under the Freedom of Information Act, though you may have to pay a small fee. It may be useful to see your file so that you can better understand reasons for the decision, and to check that facts held about you are correct.

- There is a national network of Welfare Rights Centres in capital cities and some regional centres which can provide advice on social security-related matters. The phone number of your nearest centre is in the white pages of your local phone directory under 'welfare rights'.



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

It's important to ask for a review within three months of the DSS making the original decision. If you win, arrears will only be paid if the appeal takes place within that three-month period.

Talk to the person who made the original decision, and ask for an explanation of why it was made. You should also tell the officer any new information which affects your circumstances. The officer has the power to change the first decision immediately if he or she thinks it was incorrect.

If you're still not satisfied with the decision, you can ask to have it reviewed by an Authorised Review Officer (ARO) — a senior staff member who is independent of the regional office.

The ARO will usually contact you by phone and discuss the department's decision, after which he or she will review it, considering any new information you have provided. The ARO will write within a few days to advise you of the outcome of the appeal and your right to appeal further.

If you're still not happy, you can take the matter to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT), which has the power to review decisions made by the department. The Tribunal's objective is to "provide a mechanism of review that is fair, just, economical, informal and quick". As a last resort you can appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or the Commonwealth Ombudsman or, if you question the legality of a ruling, to the Federal Court.

Case study

When Mr Smith (not his real name) turned 65, he lodged a claim for the Age Pension. He advised the Department of Social Security (DSS) that apart from the home where he lived, he also owned a small house. He estimated the value of the house to be about \$100,000. The DSS asked the Australian Valuation Office (AVO) to assess the property, which estimated it to be worth \$150,000. The DSS granted Mr Smith a pension, but at a reduced rate because of the assessed value of the second house.

Mr Smith lodged an appeal with the Social Security Appeals Tribunal. As a result of the appeal, the DSS requested the AVO to reassess the value of the property and compare it with other houses sold in the area. The AVO decided this time that the value of the property was \$120,000. The DSS accepted this value, and increased the level of Mr Smith's pension.

AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE

Check the details from your Notice of Assessment with those in your tax return. If you think there's something wrong, contact the office that issued the assessment to discuss the matter — maybe it can be resolved quickly.

If you're still unhappy, write to the tax office (ATO), and either object to the assessment or request that an amendment be made to it. Objecting to an assessment rather than requesting an amendment gives you the right to appeal and claim interest on any excess tax if your objection is successful.

You must lodge your objection or amendment request within four years of the date printed on your Notice of Assessment. If you want to object to an assessment that has already been amended, an objection must be lodged within either of these time limits, whichever is longer:

- 60 days from the date of the notice of amended assessment; or
- Four years from the notice of original assessment that has been amended.

The ATO will explain the reasons for its decisions if it doesn't allow all of your objection. You will then have the right to appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or Federal Court.

If you have a complaint about how the ATO has dealt with the matter, you can ask the Commonwealth Ombudsman to investigate. The range of complaints about the ATO the Ombudsman can investigate includes:

- Unreasonable delay in issuing refunds, amending assessments or answering letters.
- Unreasonable refusal to amend assessments.
- Failure to give reasons for a decision.
- Lost documents.
- Unfair penalties.

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS

If you or a relative living overseas has an application for a visa refused or a visa cancelled, you may appeal.

First you should ask for a review by a Review Officer of the Migration Internal Review Office (MIRO). If you're not satisfied with the outcome of the internal review, you may go to the Immigration Review Tribunal (IRT). Some decisions, such as the cancellation or refusal of visas for people in immigration detention, can only be reviewed by the IRT.

An application for a review by the IRT is made by completing and lodging form IRT01 with a \$300 application fee. You don't have to pay the fee if you're in immigration detention, or if you can prove that paying it would cause severe financial hardship. It's refunded if the IRT's decision is favourable or if the application for review is invalid.

You can apply to the Commonwealth Ombudsman to review the IRT's decision. □

Electric convection heaters

Not all electric convection heaters are powerful enough to thoroughly warm a large room and two of the models we tested weren't as safe as they should be.

IF YOU WANT TO HEAT A FAIRLY large room a fan-assisted electric convection heater may be just the thing.

We tested eight 2.4 kW electric convection heaters, and one radiant convection heater, to find out which were the best performers (see *What to buy*, below, for our recommendations). We also checked to see that the heaters were safe to operate and easy to use.

SAFETY MATTERS

Most of the heaters in this test were designed to overcome incorrect use. Most, but not all.

For instance, they all had a thermal cut-out switch, designed to automatically turn a heater off if it overheats. We tested this feature by placing a towel over each heater.

The DIMPLEX Radiant Fan Convactor, can't be recommended because its thermal cut-out switch didn't turn the heater off before the towel started to smoulder. The switch eventually cut the heater's power by half and then completely, but it didn't prevent the towel from scorching. This was the only convection heater in our test with a radiant heating element.

Stability is also a very important aspect of a heater's safety — you don't want to risk knocking your heater over. The DIMPLEX Radiant Fan Convactor has a tilt switch, which cuts power if the unit is tipped over. The other heaters would have to rely on their thermal cut-out switch to turn them off, which would only happen if the heaters fell face-down and airflow vents were covered up, causing them to overheat.

The OMEGA T3 Turbo can't be recommended because it toppled over when placed on a 15 degree test slope (prescribed in the Australian Standard to assess a heater's stability).

The GOLDAIR 8000 series of heaters is promoted as having a built-in alarm which is supposed to sound when the thermal cut-out switches are activated. During our first towel test, the GOLDAIR 8050's alarm was the only one to work. When we repeated the test, only the 8100's alarm worked. We should point out that the cut-

out switch on all the GOLDAIRs works when they start to overheat, so the problem with the alarm doesn't pose a safety risk, but it simply doesn't enhance the safety of the heaters because it's unreliable.

NOT SO NOISY

None of the fan-assisted heaters was excessively noisy; heaters without fans generated little noise at all. Even the loudest of the fan-assisted heaters, the VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe, could not be heard above normal background noise.

FROST WATCH

Some heaters, like the GOLDAIRs also have a 'frost watch' setting marked on their thermostats, which sets the thermostat at about 5°C to make sure the room temperature doesn't drop too low. You can choose a low setting on any heater with a thermostat.

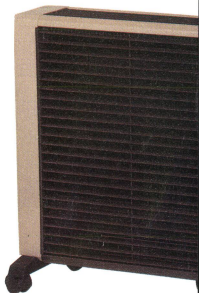
WHAT TO BUY

	VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe Manual 82E	\$299
	VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe Electronic 82F	\$389
equal	VULCAN Quasar Elite Premier Electronic 82F	\$399
	GOLDAIR Turbo-Convactor 8050	\$129
equal	GOLDAIR Turbo-Convactor 8100	\$159

The VULCAN Quasars were the best performers in our test. If you require a basic heater, the VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe Manual 82E is a good buy. The two Quasar Elite Electronic 82Fs (the Deluxe 8215 and the Premier 8218) have more features, but they're also more expensive. If you only want to heat a small room the two GOLDAIRs are far cheaper, and they're much smaller, lighter heaters.

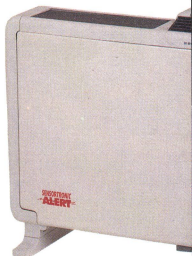
All the fan-assisted heaters performed adequately in our 6.1m by 4.9m by 2.4m test room — those without fans definitely didn't do as well. If you want to heat a larger room, only the VULCAN Quasars should be considered.

Apart from the DIMPLEX Radiant Fan Convactor, which can't be recommended for safety reasons, the VULCANs were the only models to successfully heat 100% of our test room.



VULCAN QUASAR SERIES

All the Vulcan heaters are good performers. The Elite Deluxe and Elite Premier seem to be very similar. The only difference we could detect was the colour. The Elite Deluxe Manual was similar to the other Vulcan heaters, with fewer features.



GOLDAIR 8000 SERIES

While not the best performers in our test, the Goldair 8050 and 8100 are compact and good value for money. Both models would be suitable for heating small rooms.



What to look for

- Make sure the heater has a thermostat, which means that the heating element cuts in and out to maintain a reasonably constant room temperature. Without a thermostat, heating would be continuous. Operating costs would also be higher if the element is always on.
- Fans improve heating performance overall. Buying a fan-assisted heater will give you better performance than buying a heater without a fan.
- If you're buying a larger heater, check that it has wheels, so it's easy to move around.
- If you choose a smaller heater without wheels, make sure it's light and easy to carry.
- Check our table overleaf and decide which features you require. For example, a timer might be useful if you want the heater to turn on and off automatically.

How reliable are electric heaters?

We surveyed a sample of our subscribers to ask them about the reliability of their electric heaters. We asked them if their heater had needed repairs in the previous 12 months. The results are given below for brands where we had more than 50 responses; the number in brackets is the number of heaters of a particular brand reported on by subscribers in the survey. On average, just under 5% of heaters in the sample had needed repairs during the past year, at an average cost of around \$20. Note that the results of the survey are for electric heaters of all types, not just for the models included in our test.

We also asked our survey respondents if they would buy the same brand of electric heater again.

Brand (sample size)	% not needing repair
Glenaire (50)	98
Hanimex (246)	98
Omega (124)	98
Kambrook (513)	97
Speedie (78)	97
Goldair (403)	96
Dimplex (506)	95
Electricaire (103)	94
Panasonic (57)	93
Vulcan (553)	92

Brand (sample size)	% who would buy again
Omega (130)	93
Dimplex (522)	92
Glenaire (51)	88
Vulcan (579)	87
Kambrook (511)	85
Panasonic (59)	85
Hanimex (251)	84
Speedie (77)	84
Goldair (412)	83
Electricaire (105)	79

Electric convection heaters

					1	2	3	4	5	6
	Brand/model (in rank order)	Origin	Price (\$)*	Warranty (years)	Thermostat	Fan	Timer	Humidifier	Wheels	Wall mount
	VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe Manual 82E (8216)	Australia	299	2	✓	✓			✓	✓ (B)
equal	VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe Electronic 82F (8215)	Australia	389	2	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓ (B)
	VULCAN Quasar Elite Premier Electronic 82F (8218)	Australia	399	2	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓ (B)
equal	GOLDAIR Turbo-Convector 8050	China	129	1	✓	✓		✓		✓ (C)
	GOLDAIR Turbo-Convector 8100	China	159	1	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓ (C)
	DIMPLEX EC3 Portable Convactor	UK	114	2	✓					✓ (C)
	GOLDAIR Thermo-Convactor 8000	China	99	1	✓			✓		✓ (C)
	NOT RECOMMENDED									
	DIMPLEX Radiant Fan Convactor (A)	Australia	219	2		✓				
	OMEGA T5 Turbo	Italy	129	2	✓	✓				

* Prices are a good target to aim for when shopping around based on nationwide checks in April 1995.

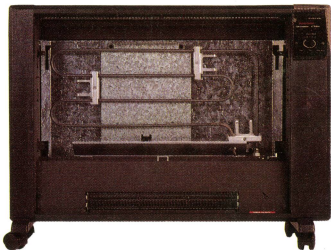
(A) The Dimplex Radiant Fan Convactor has been changed and now features additional switch settings. It is now known as the High Country Fan Glow.

(B) Wall mounting brackets available separately.

(C) Wall mounting brackets supplied with the heater.

How do convection heaters work?

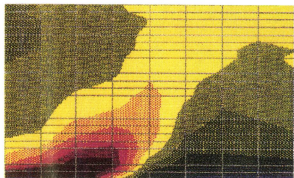
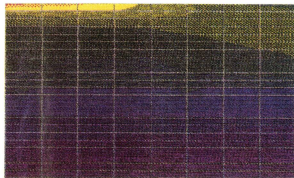
Convection heaters without fans work along the following lines. Cool air enters through vents at the bottom of the heater where it is warmed by an electric element. The warm air then rises, and cooler air moves in through the bottom vents to replace it. Oil-filled convection heaters work on a similar principle. The result is a circulation of air within the room called 'convection'.



Most of the convection heaters in this test were fan-assisted — warm air was actually pushed out through the bottom or middle of the heaters and cool air drawn in from the top. This means the warm air enters the room near floor level which is desirable.

Heat distribution

Our tests show that convection heaters with fans perform much better than those without fans. The heat maps below represent how heaters distribute warm air across the centre of the 4.9 m x 6.1 m x 2.4 m test room. The top picture is a heat map for the **GOLDAIR Thermo-Convactor 8000** heater without a fan. The heater is located in the bottom left corner of the map. The map shows that most of the warmer air collects towards the room's ceiling. The bottom heat map shows the heat distribution pattern for a fan-assisted **VULCAN Quasar Elite Premier Electronic 82F (8218)**. The heat map for the **VULCAN** shows that it distributes heat more evenly throughout the room.



	8	9	10	11	
ty score	Ease of use score (%)	Features score (%)	Area warmed to 16–20°C (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)
	56	80	100	69	VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe Manual 82E (8216)
	62	100	100	67	VULCAN Quasar Elite Deluxe Electronic 82F (8215)
	62	100	100	67	VULCAN Quasar Elite Premier Electronic 82F (8218)
	80	60	81	61	GOLDAIR Turbo-Convactor 8050
	82	80	81	61	GOLDAIR Turbo-Convactor 8100
	58	40	75	53	DIMPLEX EC3 Portable Convactor
	64	40	63	43	GOLDAIR Thermo-Convactor 8000
					NOT RECOMMENDED
	60	20	100	66	DIMPLEX Radiant Fan Convactor (8)
	70	40	81	59	OMEGA T5 Turbo

equal

equal

1 Thermostat

A thermostat allows a heater to maintain a steady room temperature. It enables power to cut on and off when the room temperature starts to vary from the desired setting.

2 Fan

Fan-assisted heaters were much better performers in our tests than those without fans. A fan is able to push warm air around the room more effectively.

3 Timer

A timer is useful if you'd like to be able to turn your heater on and off automatically. Perhaps you want to make sure your lounge room is warm when you get home from work, or your kitchen warm in the morning.

4 Humidifier

A built-in humidifier may help to keep the heated air moist.

5 Wheels

Wheels make a larger heater easier to move around, especially if it's hot.

6 Wall-mountable

Wall mounting provides a permanent and neat installation; it's useful if you have limited floor space.

7 Safety test

Safety tests were based on the relevant Australian Standards. A towel was draped over each heater, ensuring all air vents were covered. The heater was then set on maximum and allowed to heat up until either it turned off or the towel started to smoulder. Stability was tested by placing the units on a 15 degree slope.

8 Ease of use score

A panel of three people assessed the heaters for ease of use, taking into account how easy it was to move them around, control their airflow, how easy they were to clean and how easy it was to use the controls.

9 Features score

Points were given if a heater had the following features: thermostat, fan, timer, wheels, and whether the unit was wall-mountable.

PERFORMANCE

Each heater was used to heat a 6.1m x 4.9m x 2.4m room. Temperatures across the centre of the room were measured and used to plot a heat distribution map (see *Heat distribution* left). We used this data to calculate our performance scores.

10 Area warmed to 16–20°C

From our heat distribution maps, we were able to determine what percentage of the room was heated to 16–20°C (our target range), what percentage was heated to above 20°C, and what percentage of the room remained below 16°C.

11 Overall score

We based our overall score entirely on the results of our performance tests. The results include an assessment of the temperature range produced across the room (the narrower the range the better); and how much of the room area was raised to our target temperature range of 16 to 20°C or higher.

Cooktops

Glass ceramic cooktops look stylish and they're easy to clean but they use just as much energy and they're as difficult to control as conventional electric models.

IF YOU DESIGN OR REFURBISH A kitchen, you will probably have the choice of buying an upright stove or a cooktop and wall oven. The main advantage of buying the two items separately is added versatility — you can put them where they best fit into your new kitchen and choose different brands or fuels for cooktop and oven. But these advantages come at a price: separate cooktops and wall ovens are generally more expensive than conventional upright stoves.

THE MARKET

Cooktops with glass ceramic surfaces have become increasingly popular in recent times. According to some manufacturers, they now account for a third to half of the electric cooktops sold. They cost more than gas or conventional electric cooktops, but for the added expense, you get a cooktop which should look good for years.

For this test we chose 11 models with prices under \$1000, four electric elements and inbuilt controls. We excluded models with separate or remote controls, one or more halogen elements or less than four elements. We also bought an electric monotube and a gas cooktop to compare their cooking performance and temperature control with the ceramic cooktops.

CERAMIC OR NOT?

Our tests confirmed ceramic cooktops are not much different from conventional electric ones in terms of how much control you have over the temperature and how much energy they use.

DIFFICULT TO CONTROL

If you're used to cooking with electricity, you'll know the element stays hot or warm for quite some time after you've switched it off. That's the major disadvantage of electric hotplates compared with gas.

Electric hotplates — solid ones more so than coil models — make it more difficult to control cooking processes.

Unless you use the residual heat to finish cooking or to keep food warm after you've switched off the element, you're wasting energy. You also risk burning or spoiling food. We heated food on high and when it reached the desired temperature, switched off the element. On both the conventional electric and the ceramic cooktops we tested, food temperatures then continued to rise on average by about 60°C — on the gas cooktop they only rose by about 10°C.

Manufacturers say the heat from an element on a ceramic cooktop spreads only a few centimetres outside the element range. But when we turned the elements to high, we found the surface still got rather hot even 5 cm away from the elements and stayed warm for quite some time after they were switched off. It's important to have a heat indicator, a light which stays on until it's safe to touch the surface.

EXPENSIVE REPAIRS

Distributors told us these cooktops seem to need fewer repairs than conventional models but repairs could be expensive. For example with most models you would have to pay for a service call to replace the element. Replacing a broken ceramic surface would cost you nearly as much as buying a new cooktop but their surfaces aren't known to crack or shatter easily. In this test all the cooktops survived a thermal shock test (we poured cold water onto an element that had been on high for an hour).

KEEP THEM LOOKING GOOD

Ceramic cooktops do look good. They have smooth and shiny surfaces, which give them a modern and stylish appearance. They're also easy to clean, especially if you consider how fiddly cleaning some gas or conventional electric cooktops can be. If you remove spills after each use, they'll wipe off easily with an ordinary cloth and all-purpose cleaner. Make sure the cleaning product you use is non-abrasive or it could scratch the surface.

Of our four recommended models, the AEG scored best for its controls — they're a good size and comfortable to turn and the symbols indicate clearly which knob controls which element. On the other three models the controls are also comfortable to turn, but on the Bosch you have to turn anti-clockwise instead of clockwise to increase the heat. And you have to be able to read English to figure out which knob controls which element on the Simpson.

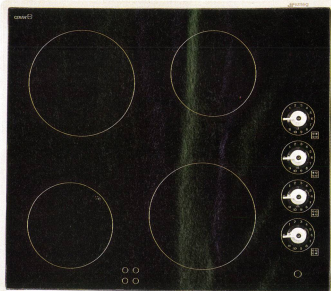
Manufacturers advise using special surface cleaners and a razor scraper for more stubborn spills. Most cooktops in this test came with a razor scraper and special cleaner. The recommended surface cleaners successfully removed most stains. They also removed dirt which had accumulated over weeks of testing and they protected the surface from smudges.

Make sure your pots and pans have smooth, flat or slightly curved bases. Some manufacturers advise against using aluminium and copper-based cookware as they can discolour the cooktop surface which can then be very difficult to clean. If you use such cookware, clean the cooktop thoroughly after each use.

We found sugary spills difficult to remove from the cooktops, but we managed to get them totally clean with the specially supplied razor scraper. It's best



AEG 6299 K



SMEG SA604WH



BOSCH NKT662NBGB

**BEST
BUY**

SIMPSON 64A985CW*00

What to look for

- **Size, shape and element arrangement.** Make sure the cooktop size and shape fits your kitchen layout. Older kitchen benches mightn't be wide enough for a square model, but a rectangular one, which usually isn't as wide and is about 30 cm longer should fit. Pots and pans may be easier to reach if the elements are arranged in a half moon or staggered.
- **Element size.** The size of the elements should fit the cookware you intend to use most frequently. Round or oval shaped dual-circuit elements, or duo zones, can accommodate larger pots and baking dishes.
- **Controls and knobs.** When you buy a cooktop, check the shape, arrangement, legibility and usefulness of the controls and symbols. You shouldn't have to study all the diagrams every time you want to use an element. Reaching for the right knob should be an almost automatic action.

to be careful when cooking with sugary liquids to prevent spills. Make sure you remove them as soon as the surface is safe to touch to prevent long-term damage to the cooktop surface.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY

All cooktops have to be connected by a qualified and licensed tradesperson. Three models — the two SIMPSON models and the CHEF — came already fitted with plugs, but they should still be connected by an electrician.

The two SIMPSON models only came with 20A plugs but 25A plugs are required for electrical loads such as would be drawn when all elements were used simultaneously. Simpson told us their models won't be supplied with 20A plugs in the future.

The SMEG model passed all our elec-

trical safety tests, but we were concerned to find that some of the water we poured next to the controls (to see how well they were sealed) seeped inside. It remained electrically safe after the spillage, but we advise you to clean up spills immediately on any electric cooktop to avoid any problems from possible leakage.

COOKING PERFORMANCE

The ceramic cooktops we tested all had similar elements; most manufacturers called them cerama or ceran speed elements, but they may have different names. They can vary in size and shape from brand to brand; they're usually packed in insulation material and sit below the ceramic glass surface. We found no differences in cooking performance between the brands and types of elements.

Apart from the BLANCO CMRS-410W, all the cooktops had the same glass ceramic surface. Probably because of their similar construction and components, the cooktops all performed well in cooking tests. That's why we've ranked them on the basis of their overall ease of use scores (see table overleaf).

WHAT TO BUY

equal	AEG 6299 K	\$950
	BOSCH NKT662NBGB	\$950
	SMEG SA604WH	\$825
	SIMPSON 64A985CW*00	\$625

The AEG, BOSCH and SMEG scored best for overall ease of use, but the SIMPSON 64A985CW*00 is good value for money and our recommended *Best Buy*.

Cooktops

	Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price (\$)*	Warranty (years)	Fitting dimensions (mm, L x W)
equal	AEG 6299 K	AEG	Germany	950	3 (B)	560 x 490
	BOSCH NKT662NBGB	Bosch	Spain	950	2	560 x 490
	SMEG SA604WH	Omega	Italy	825	1 (C)	560 x 490
	WESTINGHOUSE PHE284W	Email	New Zealand	700	1	590 x 488
	SIMPSON 64A985CW*00	Email	New Zealand	625	1	605 x 505
equal	FISHER & PAYKEL CT 5F	Fisher & Paykel (A)	New Zealand	700	2	560 x 490
	SIMPSON 64A996W*00	Email	Australia	675	1	870 x 360
	CHEF EHCFSW	Southcorp	Australia	700	1	580 x 490
	OMEGA OA4CER/1 K	Omega	Italy	900	1 (C)	560 x 490
	BLANCO CMRS410W	Major Electrical Appliances	Italy	675	1	560 x 490
	ST GEORGE CC60-2	St George	Australia	950	2	582 x 501

* Prices are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in March 1995, except for the FISHER & PAYKEL which was not available in shops when we went to press. Its price is the manufacturer's estimated retail price.

(A) This model is a new release; the manufacturer told us it will become widely available later this year.

(B) Three years' full warranty if installed by a qualified electrician, otherwise one year.

(C) According to the manufacturer, all OMEGA and SMEG models now have a two year warranty.

What else can you buy?

■ **Gas cooktops** are generally cheap to buy. The one we bought cost about \$100 less than the conventional electric one with a monotube coil element — and about \$200 less than the cheapest ceramic cooktop. Cooking with gas is also cheaper (costing usually less than half as much as electricity) and better for the environment — natural gas releases only about a quarter as much greenhouse gas (carbon dioxide) as non-hydro electricity for an equivalent amount of energy. And last, but for many cooks most important, cooking with gas gives you the highest degree of temperature control. There's instant heat when you switch it on, and no more heat when it's switched off. For all these reasons cooking with natural gas seems to be the best choice — and the one preferred by many professionals — but unfortunately it's not available to all households.

■ If your only choice is electricity, you still have a wide variety of cooktops to choose from:

Solid hotplates have heating elements embedded in a solid plate, which is usually sealed tightly to the hob surface. They're easy to clean, but take a relatively long time to heat up and even longer to cool down.

Radiant coil elements are the spiral type of heating element used on many conventional stoves. They're more energy efficient than solid elements, as they heat up and cool down faster. Temperature variations are also easier to control, but they're not as responsive as gas. Coil elements can be a nuisance to clean as food can fall through the coil. With some models you can unplug and remove the coil or swivel it up for cleaning, but it's still more difficult than with sealed or smooth-surfaced hotplates.

Mono or duotube elements are similar to coils, but the coil is generally wider, flatter and closer together. Manufacturers claim this design shortens heat-up time.

■ Some ceramic cooktops have one or more **halogen heat areas** in conjunction with other elements. These tungsten halogen lamps heat up very quickly but take a relatively long time to cool down once switched off. A heat indicator (a warning light which indicates that there's still some residual heat) is therefore quite important, as it is for other under-surface elements. Because they retain heat for so long, temperature variations are more difficult to control.

■ **Induction cooktops** are relatively new on the market in Australia. This revolutionary way of cooking works by inducing a current to flow within the base of the pot or pan, which must be made of a magnetic material such as iron. The pot is heated and then heats what's inside; the cooktop and surrounding environment stay cool. Temperature control and responsiveness are similar to using gas. We've been told induction cooktops are the way to go, but before they're generally accepted here, the price will probably have to come down. At the moment, they're still quite expensive, costing around \$2000 to \$3000.

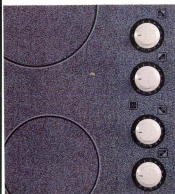
For people with disabilities

Ceramic cooktops are generally easy to use for people with a physical disability. They're shallow in depth so a person in a wheelchair can wheel in under the hob. The surface is flush with the surrounding benchtop so it's easy to slide pots and pans off the cooktop and from one element to another. But if you do slide rather than lift them off the surface, make sure your pots and pans have smooth even bases, or you risk scratching the cooktop surface.

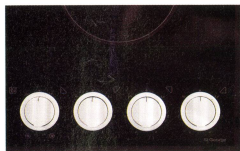
The heat indicator and controls scores in the table will give you a good idea of how easy the control knobs are to turn and how easy it is to understand the heat indicator and symbols or words used to show which knob controls which element. All these points are particularly important for people who are vision-impaired or have manual dexterity problems.

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre concurred with our assessment and found the top-scoring **AEG 6299 K** the easiest to use for people with disabilities. Its heat indicator and symbols are easy to see and logically positioned and the knobs are easy to turn.

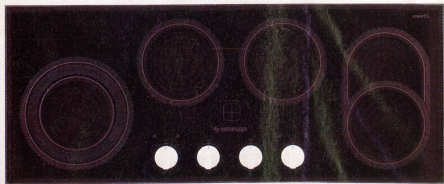
	1	2	3	4	
Cleaning fluid	Cleaning score (%)	Controls score (%)	Heat indicator score (%)	Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)
	66	90	90	78	AEG 6299 K
	70	88	80	78	BOSCH NKT662NBGB
✓	66	85	90	76	SMEG SA604WH
✓	66	78	90	73	WESTINGHOUSE PHE284W
✓	66	75	80	71	SIMPSON 64A985CW*00
✓	66	70	90	70	FISHER & PAYKEL CT 5F
✓	66	70	80	69	SIMPSON 64A996W*00
	66	68	80	68	CHEF EHCFSW
✓	66	83	20	68	OMEGA OA4CER/1 K
	62	75	30	64	BLANCO CMRS410W
✓	60	63	20	57	ST GEORGE CC60-2



The BLANCO CMRS410W was the only model with a different surface — we found it slightly more difficult to clean. All the others had surfaces made by Schott, until recently the sole supplier of glass ceramic surfaces in Australia. While the control knobs are easy to turn, we found the symbols used to illustrate which knob controls which element very confusing.



On the ST GEORGE CC60-2 it's even more difficult to determine which knob controls which element. Small gold lettering on a brown surface may look elegant, but it's difficult to read.



The SIMPSON 64A996W*00, was the only noticeably rectangular model we tested. It has the elements arranged in a half moon shape and has two dual-circuit elements, one of them oval-shaped to accommodate larger pots.

1 Cleaning score

We let rice boil over, white sauce and a sugary syrup burn and smeared butter around the elements. After they had cooled we tried to remove these stains and spills, at first by wiping with a cloth and mild detergent, then with the manufacturer's recommended cleaner and finally with a razor scraper to remove stubborn spills. The score reflects how easily the stains came off.

2 Controls score

We assessed the position of the knobs and how easily you can turn them without the risk of burning your hands. We also checked how clear and legible the symbols or words were and how clearly they indicated which knob controls which element.

3 Heat indicator score

On most models, the heat indicator shows you which element is still hot or warm. They usually go off after about 30 minutes when the surface is safe to touch. The OMEGA and the ST GEORGE models have low scores because the heat indicator only indicates residual heat somewhere on the surface — you can't tell just by looking which element is still warm. On the BLANCO the indicators are poorly positioned and hard to see. A high score indicates the heat indicators are easy to see and interpret.

4 Overall score

All the cooktops we tested performed equally well in all our cooking tests so we haven't scored them on cooking performance. They're ranked in order of overall ease of use. We've weighted ease of cleaning as 50%, ease of use of the controls as 40%, and usefulness and readability of the heat indicator as 10%.



WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

1 Disposable contact lenses don't have to be treated with special enzymes to break down protein deposits.

True or false?

2 Glucose is the ultimate source of energy for the body. To get it we have to eat food high in sugar.

True or false?

3 The distinguishing difference between insects and arachnids (spiders or mites) is:

A) The number of body segments.
B) The number of legs.
C) The presence or not of antennae.
D) All of the above.



4 Benzene is a known carcinogen. Australian petrol contains five times as much benzene as petrol sold in California.

True or false?

5 Because of their superior hearing and sense of smell, beagles are useful hunting companions.

They're also used as:

- A) Sheep dogs in far north Queensland.
B) Pest inspectors.
C) Grape pickers in the Barossa Valley.



6 The total fat content of kangaroo game meat is about:

- A) 2%.
B) 3.5%.
C) 5%.

7 Once a Commonwealth Government department makes a decision about you, there's absolutely nothing you can do to have it reviewed or changed.

True or False?

8 A colour print film's ISO rating is related to its:

- A) Ability to handle different size cameras.
B) Sensitivity to light.
C) The number of prints that can be made from the negative.

9 One method of delivering pay TV to your home is known as MDS.

- What does MDS stand for?
A) Medium density supply.
B) Microwave distribution system.
C) Multi-point digital system.
D) Multi-frequency direct satellite.



10 Some TV sets are marketed as having FST. What does FST stand for?

- A) Frequency standard tuning.
B) Full screen transmission.
C) Flatter, squarer tube.
D) Fast switching transformer.

ANSWERS

1. True. But only if they're discarded weekly or fortnightly. If you use them for longer — which is not recommended — you have to clean them, usually once a week, with special protein remover.

2. False. We don't have to eat sugary foods to get glucose. We get sufficient amounts of glucose from complex carbohydrate foods, fruits and milk. These foods also provide other important nutrients.

3. D. Spiders and mites have two body segments (insects have three), four pairs of legs (insects have three) and no antennae (insects have them).

4. False. Although the current standard allows a 5% benzene content in petrol, leaded and standard unleaded fuel sold in Australia generally contains less than 3% benzene. In the United States standard fuel may contain as much as 25% benzene, but in areas with serious ozone problems (such as Los Angeles), reformulated petrol is available with a 1% benzene content; fuel with 0.5% to 1% benzene should be

available there for sale next year.

5. B. In the US, specially-trained beagles are used to detect the presence of termites, wood-boring beetles and carpenter ants in places inaccessible to human pest inspectors.

6. A. The Australian Heart Foundation tested a number of kangaroo cuts and found they contained less than 2% fat.

7. False. Most departments have internal systems of review. Your case can also be examined by independent tribunals. See *Consumer in law* in this issue of CHOICE.

8. B. A film's speed is shown on the box as an ISO number, and is often included in its name. The more sensitive a film is to light, the faster the exposure process, and the higher its ISO number.

9. B.

10. C. A flatter and squarer screen gives a wider viewing angle and is less prone to reflection problems than a more rounded screen. In our tests we've found that some FST televisions have flatter, squarer screens than others.



RECALLS AND BANS

you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 1800 numbers for couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

Ansell International has recalled AFFINITY 12'S BBED CONDOMS BATCH NO. B408018400, as this batch does not comply with the Australian standard and may have an unacceptably high failure rate. The batch number is displayed on the carton and on the condom foil inside the carton. The expiry date of the batch is 9/98. Return unused condoms to Reply paid permit No. 114, Quality Control Manager, Ansell International, Glen Waverley, Victoria 3150. A free replacement will be mailed to you. For further information call Ansell International on 1800 337 041 or (03) 264 0888.

&D Australia has recalled B&D TILT-A-MATIC RG-306 GARAGE DOOR DRIVE UNIT, installed since December 1993, as the drive unit which opens and closes the door may be faulty and may pose an electrocution hazard. Drive units with serial numbers from G11482 to G21580 are affected. The drive unit is mounted on the ceiling of the garage and the serial number is located on the back outer casing. Turn off the power before checking the serial number. Call 1800 677 853 to arrange for a free inspection and, if necessary, repair of the unit.

United Distillers (Australia) has recalled REBEL ELL BOURBON (square 700 ml bottles, purchased from 12 December, 1994) and REAL McCoy BOURBON (square 700 ml bottles purchased from 26 January, 1995), as minute traces of glass have been detected in bottles of the products. Don't drink them. Return to place of purchase for a refund.

Honda Australia Motorcycle and Power Equipment has recalled HONDA CR125, CR250 and RS500 MOTORCYCLES (made in 1995) with the following vehicle identification numbers:

CR125R:
JH2JE01U*SM600001 to JH2JE01U*SM600230;
CR250R:
JH2ME03U*SM600001 to JH2ME03U*SM600270;
and CR500R:
JH2PE02U*SM600001 to JH2PE02U*SM600124).
The fork tubes may not have been heat-treated properly and they could develop cracks (that may not be visible to the naked eye) under the surface plating. Eventually the fork legs may fail, leading to loss of stability or control. Contact an authorised Honda Motorcycle dealer for free inspection and, if necessary, replacement of the tubes.

CORRECTION

In *Recalls and Bans* in the May 1995 issue, we said that Mirabella Imports had recalled LONG LIFE GLOBES on sale since 20/1/95. Unfortunately we printed incomplete information. The recall should have read:

Mirabella Imports has recalled LONG LIFE GLOBES (10 W, 15 W and 20 W) sold through Woolworths Supermarkets, Woolworths Variety, Crazy Prices, Safeway, Purity Supermarkets, Roelf Vos and Peanuts, on sale since 20/1/95. Mirabella has also since informed us that the recall applies only to globes sold through those outlets up to 3/3/95. The recall does not apply to Mirabella Long Life Globes sold by any other retailer. We apologise to Mirabella and retailers for any inconvenience this error has caused.

CHOICE

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FOUR-YEAR INDEX

JULY 1991 — JUNE 1995

(T) Test
(D) Includes assessment of suitability for people with disabilities
(U) Update of previous report
* Additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items, or letters

MAJOR APPLIANCE SUMMARY

TURN TO PAGE 23 FOR THE FULL FOUR-YEAR INDEX

(T) Test

(D) Includes assessment of suitability for people with disabilities

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* Additions or corrections to reports, small follow-up items or letters

Air conditioners

reverse-cycle Nov 92(T,D)

Audio equipment

buying hi-fi components Apr 92

car CD adaptors Mar 95(T)

car CD players Jan 94(T)

car radio/cassette players Jun 92(T)

cassette decks, single and twin-well for \$399 Jul 91(T,D)

CD players, multi-disc Mar 93(T)

personal CD players Mar 95(T)

personal stereos Dec 91(T,D)

portable stereos with CD player Jan 95(T)

Clothes dryers Mar 92(T,D), Feb 94(T,D)

Communications

answering machines Oct 92(T)

cellular/mobile phones (analogue) Jul 92(T,D), Aug 94(T), Nov 94*

fax machines Jan 92(T)

Computers

notebook Dec 92(T)

personal Aug 91(T), Oct 91(U)

printers Mar 93(T), May 93*

Cooktops

choosing Jan 92

electric Jun 95(T,D)

Dishwashers Feb 93(T,D), Nov 93(T,D,U)

Apr 95(T,D)

Evaporative air coolers Oct 91(T,D)

Fans, pedestal Oct 94(T)

Heaters

convection Jun 95(T)

fan (electric) Jun 94(T,D)

gas, flued Apr 93(T,D)

gas, non-flued Apr 92(T,D)

water Aug 93(T), Nov 93*

Lawnmowers

electric Nov 91(T,D), Feb 92(T,D,U)

petrol Nov 93(T), Jan 94*

push Nov 91(T,D)

Ovens

electric multi-function wall

Jun 93(T,D), Oct 93(U,T,D), Nov 93*

microwave Jul 91(T,D), Nov 91*,

Jun 92(T,D), Aug 92*, Apr 94(T,D)

Refrigerators

bar Sep 91(T,D)

2-door 200-299 L Mar 92(T)

2-door 300-350 L Sep 92(T,D)

2-door 350-400 L May 93(T), Jul 93*

2-door 395-450 L Feb 94(T,D)

2-door frost-free 350-400 L

May 93(T), Jul 93*

Sewing machines

basic Apr 93(T,D)

computerised Sep 91(T,U)

overlockers May 95(T)

TV and video equipment

TV, pocket-sized May 93(T)

TVs, medium Jul 92(T,D), Jan 93*,

Apr 95(T)

TVs, large Jun 94(T)

TVs, portable Apr 93(T,D)

video game systems Dec 93(T)

video recorders

Oct 91(T), Mar 93(T),

May 94(T), Feb 95(T)

Vacuum cleaners

expensive Oct 93(T,D)

low-priced Jul 94(T,D)

mid price range Aug 91(T,D), Sep 91*

shampoo May 93(T,D)

Washing machines Nov 91(T,D), Feb 92*,

Jan 93(T,D), Mar 93*, Sep 93(T,D),

Sep 94(T,D), Nov 94(U,T), Feb 95*

Water heaters Aug 93(T), Nov 93*

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